

# The Eternal Capital

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## Foreword

As I moved around Delhi month after month I realized it is a consummate city. For the food lover it has the ancient markets as well as the famous street food of Delhi. For the culturally inclined it has a robust performing arts and crafts scene. And those who like me are historically inclined will find that it has history written on every stone and every brick.

While visiting the monuments of Delhi I wanted to write the story of Delhi since a millennium of politics, war, murder and mayhem and the lives of people among this tumult has left a million little stories to be told. But it is no easy task to write about a city that already had tomes filled in its praise. To flesh out my book I attempted reading about the history of Delhi narrated by the ancient and contemporary historians. Most of the books had battle after battle jumping out of every page. But I did not want to concentrate solely on wars; I was more interested in the way the nobles and general people lived in those ages. Whenever I had visited a monument I could not help wondering who those people were that built it, and what their everyday lives were like. My reading of history gave me some of these answers. Those uncertain times spawned some fantastical stories. There are hints of rumours of a noble making overtures towards a queen and the queen cutting off her curls to spurn her tiresome lover, or one reads of an objection raised to a man being in-charge of the *zenana* (harem) instead of a eunuch thereby showing the prudery of the times, while stories of the extravagance of some of the ancient emperors give an idea of their omnipotence. Thus reading the eventful history of Delhi written by its historians brought the faded, black-and-white characters I had read in school text-books to colour. My visits to the various monuments were no less interesting. When I was visiting the mosque inside Qudsia Bagh, I went in barefoot to click snapshots of the interior. As I came out I saw a man performing ablutions before starting his *namaaz*. Upon seeing me wearing my shoes he said “Why are you wearing your shoes? It is *namaaz* time already”. I replied “I did not come here to perform *namaaz*” but he would not listen. He was annoyed that I was leaving without offering prayers. I had a hard time convincing him politely that I was interested in the building for its historical value and not the religious one. My visit to Razia Sultan’s tomb in the congested, labyrinthine lanes near Turkman Gate was seen by the denizens of the area with suspicion and one even stopped me to ask me what business I had coming there, while another asked me to which newspaper I belonged.

On a visit to the Kotla Mubarakpur Complex after seeing the tombs of Chhote Khan and Bade Khan I asked a lady shopkeeper nearby “I have heard there are other tombs nearby. Can you point me to them?” She seemed confused. She looked at me most innocently and asked me in the most sincere tone “But why would anybody want to visit a tomb?” That summed up the world-view regarding my unusual interest in visiting old monuments. My friends also thought of me as a loony for visiting tombs, mosques, *dargahs* and forts week after week, sometimes in preference to spending an evening with them. But for me the discovery of Delhi was a fascination which utterly consumed my mind.

I would like to thank the people of Archaeological Survey of India for putting up informative plaques at different monuments; this really gets a lay person involved with the monument he is seeing. I would also like to thank the on-line library website archive.org for the good work it has done in bringing into public domain some lost, long-forgotten books, books like the “History of India as Told By its Own Historians” series.

I would like to think of this book as the byproduct of the process of my understanding this mesmerizing city called Delhi.

## Introduction

Delhi has been the capital of India for almost a millenium, an important city since recorded history. The Mahabharata talks of the five Pandava brothers getting five villages to rule from Dhritarashtra, one of them was Indraprastha or Inderpat. This is supposedly the site at which the Old Fort of Delhi stands today. Excavations around Delhi have yielded painted grey ware pottery which leads to the surmise that the area was inhabited around three thousand years back.

The city has been called by many names which are variants of each other. The older names Dilli, Dihli and Dehli gave way to Delhi. Later when Lutyens designed the new capital of India his new city subsumed parts of older cities and came to be known as New Delhi. The area around Red Fort which was built by Shah Jahan came to be called around this time as Old Delhi.

In recorded history of the last thousand years there have been eight major cities built around this area by various ruling dynasties and these are known as the eight cities of Delhi. None of these dynasties could survive for very long and were defeated by the succeeding dynasty of rulers. Thus in the last millennium the Slave dynasty was followed by the Khilji dynasty, then the Tughlaq dynasty, the very short-lived Sayyid dynasty followed by the Lodis and finally the great Mughals and the British. Delhi famously became the graveyard of all these empires.

The first city of Delhi was Lal Kot built by the Tomars though not much of it survives. Its walls can still be seen at Mehrauli near Qutub Minar. Later, around the end of the twelfth century were built the Qutub Minar and Quwwatul Islam mosque by the rulers of the Slave dynasty. Next to be constructed was the city of Siri, built by Alauddin Khilji at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Again most of it has been devoured by time or even demolished, but some of its thick fortifications can be seen near the Siri Fort Auditorium. The Chor Minar is believed to be built in this period.

The third city, also built in the early fourteenth century, was the ill-fated city of Tughlaqabad which was deserted almost as soon as it was built, apparently due to a saint's curse. One can still visit the ruins inside Tughlaqabad fort and the nearby, smaller Adilabad fort.

Jahanpanah is considered to be the fourth city; this was the city mentioned by Ibn Battuta in his travelogue of the mid-fourteenth century. Some of its remains can be seen today in the Begumpur village near Hauz Khas. The ruins of Bijay Mandal and the stark, spartan but beautiful Begumpuri Mosque were part of Jahanpanah. Other structures include Lal Gumbad and Kharbuzewala Gumbad.

The fifth city was Firozabad which was named after the reigning Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq, who ruled in the latter half of the fourteenth century. Glimpses of this city can be seen in Kotla Firoz Shah. The famous Hauz Khas *madrassa* near the Hauz Khas Tank and the Kalan Masjid near Turkman Gate also belong to this period. The sixth city was Deenpanah, brought into existence by Humayun's command in the sixteenth century. This was at the site where today the Old Fort of Delhi stands.

The capital had moved to Agra during the Lodi period and during Akbar's and Jahangir's rule before it moved back to Delhi. The seventh and most written-about was the city of Shahjahanabad built by Shah Jahan in the middle of the seventeenth century. It was built around the Chandni Chowk area. This is the city to which people refer when they talk of the glorious days of Delhi. It is known for the Jama Masjid, Fatehpuri Mosque, Khari Baoli and for its Parathewali Gali among other gems. It is this city which saw the height of Mughal splendour under Shah Jahan and the decline of the empire under Muhammad Shah Rangila and Shah Alam II and ultimately its demise under Bahadur Shah Zafar's watch.

The final city is known as Lutyens' Delhi. When the British decided to shift their capital from Calcutta to Delhi a new city was needed to house the Secretariat as well as the officials working there. A whole new city emerged from the ground under the supervision of the architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker. India Gate, the North and South Block Ministry buildings and Rashtrapati Bhavan are some of the well-known monuments built at this time.

So how do we know of the history of this city? Who were the people who painstakingly jotted down the major events during their lifetimes, and also the achievements and failures of their kings, as well as the gossip of the day?

Many of the legends of those times have travelled to us by word of mouth from one generation to the next. Though they may not be creditable as true history nevertheless they are many times more absorbing than actual facts and form the major charm of the narrative of Delhi's story, so I have included many such legends in this book. Some of the events were faithfully recorded by historians of the time. Among them was the famous poet Amir Khusro who wrote about his contemporary happenings. The times of Balban, the earlier Tughlaq reigns and part of Firoz Shah Tughlaq's rule has been recorded by Ziauddin Barani. The latter part of his reign is given in great detail by Shams-i-Siraj-i-Afif. Ibn Battuta has described in detail the times and quirks of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Emperor Akbar's rule has been recorded in *Ain-I Akbari* by Abul Fazal and a very interesting but antagonistic account was given by Badauni. The *Shahjahanama* had many authors like Abdul Hamid Lahori, Inayat Khan, Muhammad Salih Kamba, among others. The problem with a majority of the authors, Badauni excluded, was that they depended on the patronage of the kings and so accentuated their achievements and kindnesses, while at the same time omitting or at least diminishing their foibles. The Mughals were keen chroniclers of their rule, and first Mughal emperor Babur even kept his own diary in which he honestly recorded many day-to-day events and his impressions of Hindustan; this diary became known as the *Baburnama*. One exception to this was the rule of Emperor Aurangzeb. After eleven years of reign he stopped the practice of recording court events, and so whatever is known of his rule comes from chronicles generally written based on accounts from eye-witnesses obtained after his death. Finally, the accurate accounts probably come from those foreigners who were uninterested in the country's politics. One such account of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Delhi is Francois Bernier's '*Travels in the Mughal Empire*' which I have included in this book.

Delhi of those times was a prosperous and leading city of the East. One reads that people from all parts of the Islamic world were attracted to the capital to try their luck and fortune, some of them rising through the ranks due to their military or political prowess and becoming leading members of the imperial court. Unfortunately the same prosperity of Hindustan also attracted the envious eyes of the outer world and Hindustan faced regular invasions right from the Greeks, the Scythians, the Kushans, the Huns, to the Turks, the Afghans, the Timurids, and then the Europeans, most notably the British.

The prized trophy of Hindustan also led to endless battles of succession which ultimately led to the weakening of the empire. Finally, the untold wealth which came into the hands of the victor led to the decadence and softening of the martial spirit in the later emperors. One reads of a Mughal who was devoted to his harem, or a king who was helpless before the wiles of a courtesan.

Women are of course largely absent from the Delhi scene of activity. The name of Razia Sultan stands out as the woman who went against the orthodoxy of her time and assumed the role of the Delhi monarch. However her rule was short-lived and Delhi went back to its patriarchal ways. There was Jahangir's wife Nur Jahan who ran the empire while her husband spent his time drinking. There are other characters like Roshan Ara and Jahan Ara who played their role in changing history due to their royal status but they too went back into the shadows after their short stints. The other names are mostly of courtesans like Lal Kunwar who enthralled the vacuous Jahandar Shah to the point of ruin, or sometimes there is mention of slave-girls.

And predictably the history of Delhi has not always been a very happy one. Being the central city of Hindustan every invader tended to show his might by capturing Delhi. So I lost count of the number of times Delhi was sacked by the outsiders. The horrible atrocities committed by Timur were followed by Nadir Shah's plunder and massacre and collection of a hefty ransom. The Marathas, when they got a chance, occupied Delhi for a while, while Ghulam Qadir the Rohilla went to the extent of blinding the emperor as he went around looking for an imagined treasure.

Reading about the fortunes of various dynasties one gets the idea of how fragile the concept of empire was in Hindustan. Most Empires did not last for over a century. Even the great and formidable Mughal Empire was mainly lost in just thirty years after Aurangzeb's death by his inept descendants, though it continued in name for over a century more.

And lastly, but certainly not the least, are the resident ghosts of Delhi. In many of the places I visited I found stories about those places being infested by ancient ghosts. There came a point when I also almost started

believing in the existence of these ghosts of Delhi and their power over human existence and fate.

The history of Delhi is the history of Hindustan and its politics with the victories, intrigues, human passions and indiscretions in full glare.

## Slave Dynasty and Khilji Dynasty

Muhammed Ghori started expanding the rule of his dynasty in north-western India in the name of his brother Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammed of Ghor. He wrested control of Lahore from the Ghaznavid empire in around 1186 A.D. and then turned his attention to Prithviraj Chauhan III's territory. Thus were fought the two battles of Tarain (Taraori), Haryana, in the years 1191 and 1192. In the first battle Prithviraj Chauhan defeated him but Ghori was victorious in the second battle. Stories abound about this battle. There are fantastic stories about a saint materializing into Muhammed Ghori's dream and exhorting him to mount an attack on Hindustan and promising him success. Another pre-cursor to this story narrates that Prithviraj's mother had warned him not to let the very saint settle in his territory as a dream in turn had warned her that he would bring their doom. More information, though certainly not very reliable, about Prithviraj's life is given by his biography 'Prithviraj Raso' written by his court poet Chand Bardai. He writes that in the first battle of Tarain when Ghori was defeated and brought in front of Prithviraj bound in chains, the Hindu king had spared his life, much against the advice of his ministers. When the tables turned after the second battle Ghori was not so clement and imprisoned Prithviraj and also had him blinded with red-hot iron rods. The story then becomes even more heroic and the poet states that it was conveyed to Ghori that the Hindi King was such a consummate archer that even when blinded he could hit a target just by surmising its location by sound. The surprised Ghori agreed to test this claim by himself giving the order to shoot. Upon hearing the order Prithviraj shot an arrow through the throat of Ghori, thus silencing him.

A saner version of Ghori's death is provided in H.M. Elliot's compendium 'The History of India as told by its own Historians' which carries an extract of Minhaj-ud-Din Siraj's Tabakat-i-Nasiri in which it is stated that Ghori was assassinated by the infidels when he was returning to Ghazna after putting down a revolt in Hindustan.

Ghori treated his slaves with affection, and many of them were educated and they rose to seats of power under him. He had no heir and so expected his able slaves to carry forward the torch bearing his name. A slave of his by the name Qutubuddin Aibak (his little finger was broken and so he was called Aibak, which meant 'one whose hand is maimed') conquered Delhi in 1191 A.D. After Ghori's assassination in 1206 Qutubuddin Aibak rose to become Sultan of Delhi, and this dynasty earned the moniker Slave dynasty or Mamluk dynasty. The dynasty lasted for the better part of the century, but Aibak's rule lasted for a mere four years. He died when he fell under his horse while playing *chaugan* or polo and was buried in Lahore; his one enduring achievement was the commissioning of the Qutub Minar. The next in line (after an inconsequential period of a year when Aram Shah held the position) to the throne was yet another slave Shamsuddin Altamash, also known as Iltutmish, who had married Qutubuddin Aibak's daughter and had become his son-in-law. Altamash had risen from the ranks to become first the chief of the guards under Qutubuddin and then *amir-shikar* or chief huntsman, and then was given Gwalior and finally Badaun to rule. Ghori had seen his feats of bravery and had granted him freedom. Considered as the best ruler of the Slave dynasty, Altamash's long reign saw him consolidate his hold over the northern part of India. The Qutub Minar was completed in his rule. Considered as a masterpiece tower approaching perfection, the Qutub Minar, made of sandstone, has aged surprisingly well. Standing around 240 feet tall with Quranic inscriptions on its smooth walls the top can be reached by climbing a spiral staircase of 379 steps, though this painful pleasure is now out of reach for the visitors. The lower storey was completed during Aibak's reign, and then three more storeys were constructed by Altamash. When the Minar was damaged by lightning Firoz Shah Tughlaq had the top storey replaced by the existing two storeys and a cupola on top. In the nineteenth century the British tinkered with the structure by replacing the cupola with a *chhatra*, but on another lightning strike Lord Hardinge had the *chhatra* removed.

Next to the Qutub Minar is the Quwwatul-Islam Masjid, the name when translated stands for 'Might of Islam'. It is the oldest surviving mosque in India. Built by Qutubuddin Aibak from 1193 to 1197 it is a rectangular, cloistered structure, with the pillars or carved columns cannibalized from twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples. The main prayer hall used to have a magnificent screen of five huge arches; the arches are now broken but their fine structure and the beautiful inscriptions on them give one the idea of past majesty. The mosque also gives one the confused impression of being simultaneously a Hindu as well as an Islamic monument; the reason could be that at this period Islamic architecture had still not made its presence felt in

India and most architecture was mainly Hindu, so the artisans working on the mosque might have ended up giving it the customary Hindu character.

The famous non-rusting iron pillar is in the middle of the courtyard of the Quwwatul Islam mosque. It is a bare, tapering pillar, originally with the image of *Garud* at the top, now lost. The pillar was probably made in the fourth century and the inscription on it records that it was dedicated to Lord Vishnu and set up on a hill called Vishnupada.

So how did it land here in Delhi? There are two stories related to it. According to the first it was brought here by King Anangpal Tomar who ruled sometime before Prithviraj Chauhan; the second says that it was brought there from Udaigiri in Vidisha district by Altamash in the year 1233. It stands at a total height of 24 feet and has a weight of six tonnes and it is assumed that the high phosphorus content protects it from rust.

Next to the mosque and seemingly a part of it is the incredibly beautiful tomb of Altamash, built by himself before his death. The square chamber once held aloft a circular dome, which has since fallen. Built of red sandstone and marble, it seems as though every inch of its interior is filled with carving and calligraphy. In the middle is the grave of the Sultan himself which is covered with a splendid, white tombstone which reached high above the level of my head.

Altamash died in April 1236. During his lifetime he had lost his eldest son Nasiruddin who was his heir; this loss affected Altamash greatly. He built a grand tomb for his son which is today known as Sultan Ghari meaning 'The Sultan's Cave'. It lies close to the C-block of Vasant Kunj and is one of Delhi's oldest tombs. I had a tough time finding it since it lies in the middle of nowhere and people do not know it by its name. So I asked around if there was an old monument nearby and somebody told me there was a *pir baba's dargah* (saint's mausoleum) which was very ancient. I went to the supposed *dargah* and it turned out to be Nasiruddin's tomb.

The square tomb stood on a high base of rubble masonry. A tall, arched gate led up to a courtyard. The hewn-stone walls all around were of sober, weathered-down, buff-colour stone except for the main *mihrab* in the west-facing wall and its pillars which were of white stone. Curiously the west-facing wall also had arched openings; this is rarely found since in most tombs the entire western wall, in the direction of the *qibla*, is closed. The main *mihrab* was richly carved with calligraphic inscriptions all over, with an eight-sided pyramidal dome covering it. There were circular galleries for viewing at all four corner of the tomb covered with squat, circular domes.

In the middle of the courtyard was the main attraction, an octagonal platform around five feet high. I was wondering the purpose of the octagon when I spotted on one side there were stairs leading down to a kind of grotto-like pillared room. This was where the main tombstone lay along with other graves. The graves were covered with green cloth and had candles burning just like for a Sufi saint. I learnt that people from surrounding villages indeed believed this to be the tomb of a saint and visited it regularly, seeking blessings.

Around the main tomb building there was a maze of ruins extending to some distance. Originally there must have been a tomb complex over here with attached residential structure, probably for the priests appointed to perform prayer at the tomb.

Altamash's other sons were deemed feckless, so he nominated his daughter Razia as the future ruler of his realm. It was considered almost sacrilegious by the society of the time to have a woman as ruler, and his council of advisors including his *amirs* and officials did not come around to accede to Altamash's wishes. After Altamash died her brother Ruknuddin was placed on the throne instead but he lasted for just about seven months. He was very generous to one and all, but also very licentious and fond of sensual pleasures and greatly favoured singers, jesters and also catamites. Minhaju-s Siraj, who lived around that time, states that his mother had a younger brother of his called Qutubuddin blinded and later killed. When the mother tried to do the same with Razia, the people rose against Ruknuddin (who was away from Delhi at the time) and Razia took control of the palace. Razia was now put on the throne and she sent troops to get hold of Ruknuddin and bring him to Delhi. He was imprisoned and died subsequently.

Thereafter she ruled the kingdom like a male monarch; she is known to have ridden to battle leading her army. She also is known to have taken off her veil for good, put on a coat and cap and shown her face among men, no doubt to prove to her people her capability to rule them. But the bias among the chieftains against a

female occupying the throne kept her on tenterhooks perpetually. Besides, Razia had become fond of her abbyssinian slave Jamalauddin Yakut, who was appointed as the *amir* of the stables. Later she would elevate him to the post of her personal attendant. Display of perceived intimacy between them gave rise to rumours in public of him being her paramour. This gave rise to endless controversy; simultaneously a rebellion broke out led by Malik Altunia, the governor of Tabarhindh (Bhatinda in Punjab) and supported by some of Razia's men (another version of this story, popular among the people, says that Razia and Yakut were lovers, and Malik Altunia was the jealous governor of Bhatinda and her childhood friend and had always had his eyes on her). Razia marched out to fight him, but lost the battle and was imprisoned in the famous and very ancient Qila Mubarak Fort of Tabarhindh. The slave Yakut is said to have been killed. Razia proved to be a pragmatic ruler as she agreed to marry the governor. Meanwhile her brother Muizzuddin Bahram Shah was put on the throne by the nobles and officials and she along with her husband was forced to wage a battle against her brother. Again she lost, and the couple fled to Kaithal, where they were killed by the Hindus. Her grave is in the old part of Delhi, close to the Chawri Bazaar area, though there is speculation that the real tomb is in Kaithal, where she died. However Shams-i-Siraj Afif in his *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* does mention about Razia's tomb being in Delhi while Ibn Battuta also mentions that her grave lay near Jumna at some distance from the city.

After a long walk through a labyrinth of lanes, and after taking directions from a dozen people I reached her desolate resting place. The area around her grave had been encroached and there were houses all around, with just enough space left for the tombs. Next to Razia's tomb was another tomb which is believed to be her brother Ruknuddin's, and then there were two other unidentified graves further apart. The graves were very simple, unadorned belying the fact that in one of them lay an empress of Hindustan, a remarkable woman who took on the patriarchy of her time. Ibn Battuta mentions that by the time of his visit, a hundred years later, Razia's grave had become almost a place of pilgrimage among the people. He also talks of a dome being built over her tomb, but today the tombs are under the open sky.

Bahram Shah ruled for two uneasy years but relationships between him and his nobles and officials deteriorated to such an extent that they deposed him, put him in prison and later killed him. The nobles released from prison Alauddin Masud Shah, the son of Ruknuddin. He was settled upon as the new sultan in the year 1242. Minhaju-s Siraj says he was a king of many good qualities and his earlier reign was good. He fought many battles and achieved numerous victories. But with time his cruel and pleasure-loving qualities came to the fore; in his cruelty he had many of his nobles killed. Thus, in 1246, after four years of rule, he was also imprisoned by his nobles and subsequently he died.

After Alauddin there was the reign of Nasir-ud-din, a son of Altamash; he was born after the death of his elder brother Nasiruddin (the one for whom the Sultan Ghari tomb was built) and so was named after him. He ruled from 1246 to 1266. Ziauddin Barani in *Tarikhi-i-Firoz Shahi* says that in the thirty years between 1236 and 1266 the power of the state had grown weak and was in continual decline and the fear of authority had gone out of the hearts of the people, due to some sultans giving in to leading licentious lifestyles and even because of the mild rule of Sultan Nasiruddin. The treasury had become empty and the royalty was impoverished, while the group of 'The Forty' Turkish slaves had grown in power after Altamash's death. Now, during the reign of Nasiruddin a lot of influence was held by a slave called Ghiyasuddin Balban, also called Ulugh Khan who had the command of his army; according to Barani it was Balban who wielded real power at this time, while Nasiruddin was a puppet king.

This Balban had been sold as a slave in Baghdad when he was a child, and had been brought to Delhi where Altamash had bought him to serve as a personal attendant. He rose in rank swiftly even during Altamash's rule and after his death became lord chamberlain. He was of the powerful group of Turkish slaves called 'The Forty'. After Nasir-ud-din's death Balban rose to become the sultan and ruled for another two decades. Altamash had been a pious, kindly monarch, ruling with a soft hand. During his rule the power was distributed almost equally between the King and his nobles. This had emboldened the nobles and thus there had followed a period of instability after Altamash's death. This led Balban to deal with his nobles with an iron fist. On becoming the sultan Balban strengthened his army by increasing its size and set about undermining the power of the nobles, especially the group of 'The Forty'; this led to the power being concentrated in the hands of an autocratic



monarch. He was more interested in consolidating his rule over his existing kingdom than in expansion or even in recovering the territory lost during the previous tumultuous years. He brought the glory back to the crown of Delhi. He set about creating a fear of authority in the hearts of the people, to make them obedient to the government, but his just and impartial rule ensured that his subjects supported him. He tried to provide his people with a stable government, protecting them from the highwaymen and dacoits. In fact he never went far from Delhi for fear of Mongol (also called as Mughals) attacks; he went out mainly for hunting so that his men did not become lazy and soft, and made sure he returned at night. One of the few times he was away from Delhi was when he went away for three years to punish the renegade Tughril Khan who had revolted in Lakhnauti in the east.

He lived to the grand old age of eighty-seven and his tomb is in Mehrauli, close to the Qutub Minar and next to the Kamali Jamali Mosque. The tombstone is in ruins as well as the structure around it. The tomb is approached through an arched gate made of rubble masonry, a substantial structure, but one which exudes simplicity because of its drabness. The cenotaph itself does not convey to the visitor that it belongs to one of the most powerful sultans of Delhi.

Barani states that when Balban was on his death bed he called for his son Bughra Khan from Lakhnauti and told him to stay by his side in Delhi and take over the rule. He also warned him that if he left Delhi then Balban would choose somebody else for ruling Hindustan, and Bughra should accept being his subordinate. But Bughra decided to leave for Lakhnauti and Balban, true to his word, nominated his dead son's son Kai-Khusrau as his heir. But when he died his officials put Kai-Khusrau aside and made Bughra's son Kaiqubad the king. Kaiqubad was around seventeen or eighteen years old when he became the king in 1286. He had been brought up under Balban's care and Balban had ensured a strict upbringing. So when he became the sultan he gave a free run to the bottled-up, profligate side of his character. He built a palace and garden for himself by the side of the Jumna where he indulged in pleasure and sensuality while his minister had Balban's choice Kai-Khusrau murdered. Things reached a point where his father Bughra from Lakhnauti advised him to temper down his dissolute behaviour. The governance of Delhi again deteriorated under such carelessness. Meanwhile the Sultan had a paralytic attack and became an invalid. Since his recovery was not to be hoped for, the nobles and *amirs* put his son who was just a child on the throne. At this juncture the Khilji clan under Jalaluddin wrested control from the Mamluks, killed Kaiqubad and established the reign of their dynasty.

The rule of this dynasty was to be a short-lived one, and lasted for just three decades. At first the people of Delhi were averse to the throne being occupied by the Khiljis since they were used to the rule of the Slave dynasty; by degrees they came to accept the new ruler Jalaluddin, who was an old man of above seventy. This new ruler was a soft-hearted king, as is seen from the fact that when he had captured nobles who had rebelled against him, he set them free and honoured them instead of killing them all. Even thieves were pardoned upon their taking an oath of rectifying their behavior. The fierce Mongol hordes that were defeated by his army too received mercy when they converted to Islam, and were settled in and around Delhi by the name 'New Muslims'. This simple-mindedness of the Sultan led to people believing that he was not fit to rule and someday his crown would be snatched from him. That the crown would be snatched by his own nephew and son-in-law Alauddin, whom the Sultan had brought up, was not anticipated.

Alauddin had marched to Deogir without informing the Sultan of his intention. He defeated the army there and plundered a huge booty. Then he led the Sultan to believe that he was penitent for having gone on the expedition for over a year without his permission, and would only feel better if Sultan Jalaluddin went to him and consoled him; besides he had the loot from Deogir to present to the Sultan. Greed was aroused in the King's mind and he agreed to Alauddin's treacherous plan and went to meet him without his usual security, only to be beheaded by Alauddin's supporters. Jalaluddin's queen, on hearing of his murder, raised their youngest son Ruknuddin Ibrahim to the throne. But Alauddin won over the nobles and *amirs* by distributing the loot from Deogir among them; the queen was forced to flee and after five months of Jalaluddin's murder Alauddin became the next king.

His rule lasted for a good twenty years till 1316. Alauddin was the ruler who extended Muslim rule to South India, by conquering states like Devagiri (Deogir), while Telangana also agreed to pay annual tribute. Thus

tributes came pouring into Delhi from his vassal states and Delhi turned into a prosperous cultural centre. Musicians and artists from the various parts started migrating to Delhi to try their luck in the empire's capital. Even as administrator he proved to be as capable as at conquering new territories. One of his famous administrative successes was the price control measures to keep down the price of necessary commodities. This was necessitated by the need of keeping a large army to defend his territory from the Mongols. To keep such a large army and to give adequate income to every soldier would have emptied the treasury soon, and so it was required to fix the price of food-grains at a cheap rate. He allowed his subjects to pay land revenue in the form of food-grains, and to store this grain he built vast granaries which were used as buffers during famines, and so the price of grain was controlled at all times. Another measure Alauddin instituted was to ensure that merchants were not allowed to buy food-grains and re-sell them at a profit; besides he organized an efficient bureaucracy to implement these measures and daily reports on market price of food-grains were made to the Sultan. If the price of grain increased or in time of famine if a poor person did not get assistance it was the officials or overseers who were punished. Besides this there were regulations issued to keep down the rate of essential items like clothes, vegetables, fruits, oil, and also horses, cattle and slaves. The historian Barani writes "The price of a serving girl was fixed from 5 to 12 *tankas*, of a concubine 20, 30 or 40 *tankas*. The price for a male slave was 100 to 200 *tankas*. If such a slave as could not be bought for 1000 or 2000 *tankas* came into the market, he was sold for what he would fetch, in order to escape the reports of the informers (to the Sultan). Handsome lads fetched 20 to 30 *tankas*; the price of domestic labourers was 10 to 15 *tankas*, and of young domestic slaves 17 or 18 *tankas*" If a vendor was found selling produce at the fixed market rate but cheating customers by giving less weight of the product, his punishment was severe; the Sultan would sometimes send his servants to buy produce in the market to ascertain that there was no wrongdoing. The deficient weight would be extracted by cutting it from the thighs of the vendor. Thereafter the vendors became so scrupulous that they gave extra weight of the article so as not to risk losing their flesh. Alauddin also had great success in keeping the Mongols at bay. When they attacked Delhi they were soundly defeated by the Sultan's forces, and pyramids and towers were constructed of their severed heads. This made him pretty popular with his subjects, even though he had kept them on a tight leash, and they are known to have visited his grave after his death. His rule is supposed to have been one of the happiest periods in Delhi's history and was talked about in glowing terms even a hundred years after him, in spite of the cruel and bloody way in which he became king.

Alauddin's stamp can be seen all over Delhi even today. He built the now almost-vanished Siri fort to tackle the menace of Mongol attacks on Delhi. According to legend hundreds of Mongol heads were buried to form the foundations of his fort and thus the name Siri. Very little of Siri fort and city survive today. One can trace some length of the fortified walls which are made of rubble masonry and are several feet thick, giving the idea of how imposing the fort must have been in its heyday, but that's about it.

Another structure built during this period which does not fail to capture a visitor's attention is the Chor Minar. It is situated in the swanky Hauz Khas area, surrounded on all sides by a residential colony today. It is a strange, deathly, stark, round tower and it gave me a creepy feeling standing next to it. It has circular holes in the round wall and it is believed that the severed heads of thieves and criminals were placed in these holes, as exemplary punishment to dissuade others from following suit.

To provide the populace of Siri with water during the summer months he had the Hauz Alai tank built in the year 1295. Later when it dried up due to neglect and silting Firoz Shah Tughlaq had it excavated again, and thereafter it came to be known as Hauz Khas or the Royal Tank. The tank covers a substantial area and I found it impressive to see that such a huge reservoir was built seven hundred years back with human toil.

The Qutub Complex where the Qutub Minar stands turned out to be the favourite spot of many rulers, including Khilji. A plaque at the entrance of the complex notes that right from the era of Siri to that of Shahjahanabad the site never lost its importance. Khilji's tomb is located inside the Qutub Complex, at a little distance from the Qutub Minar. It is just a rectangular slab poking out of the earth, enclosed by simple walls

and an arched entrance (In Futuhat-i-Firoz-Shahi it is mentioned that Firoz Shah repaired the tomb with a door of sandalwood, but of course, there is no trace of that today). I saw some youngsters getting themselves photographed standing on his tomb, blissfully unaware of the fact that an emperor of India was buried beneath. Next to Alauddin's grave is situated the *madrassa* built by him. It is a long row of impressive rooms, surprisingly well built, of regular hewn blocks, instead of the usual rubble masonry.

As the years of his rule went by his ambition soared and in 1311 he decided to improve upon the Qutub Minar by building another tower of double the height and girth. This was to be known after him as the Alai Minar. However in five years' time, while the tower was under construction Alauddin died and work on his *minar* stopped, never to be resumed. The tapering stump of his new tower still remains with its entrance and windows, standing close to the Qutub Minar. Even the first storey could not be completed, yet it appears to be an imposing structure. One can only imagine what it would have looked like if it had been completed.

Khilji also extended the Quwwatul-Islam Masjid and added four gateways. Three of these gateways caved in; the fourth and existing southern gateway is called the Alai Darwaza. It is a beautiful gate built of red sandstone and pure white marble. There are intricate geometric patterns, so characteristic of Islamic architecture, seen carved on every bit of space, including the *jaalis*. This is mixed with columns and arches of Islamic verse written in calligraphy. There is also sparse use of flower patterns, the overall effect being rather pleasing.

As Alauddin grew older he leaned heavily on a eunuch Malik Naib Kafur 'Hazardinari' and made him the *wazir* and commander of the army. Upon the Emperor's death by dropsy Kafur put Prince Shahabuddin Umar on the throne, who was only a child of six, and real power passed into the hands of Kafur. He had two sons of Alauddin named Khizr Khan and Shadi Khan blinded, and was planning the same fate for another son Mubarak Khan. But some slaves of Alauddin slayed Kafur and freed Mubarak Khan. Mubarak acted as the governor of Shahabuddin for some time, but later put himself on the throne as Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah. The child Shahabuddin was sent to prison at Gwalior and the Sultan had him blinded; later he had Khizr, Shadi and Shahabuddin killed. Mubarak Shah's four year reign saw the strictness of the previous regime fade away; he was again a youth fond of pleasure. He did away with all the disciplinarian rules of Alauddin's reign; the price control measures taken by Alauddin were abandoned and prices of everyday items rose again. Barani says that now the price of a boy, or handsome eunuch, or beautiful damsel, varied from 500 to 1000 and 2000 *tankas*. History repeats itself again; the Sultan was bewitched by a person called Khusrau Khan, and he made Khusrau the leader of the army and later the *wazir* at his court. The Sultan himself indulged in various pleasures and drinking and kept vile creatures for company. Barani says he broke all rules of decency and appeared among his companions dressed in women's clothing; he gave up appearing for prayer in public and broke the Ramzan fast. Khusrau Khan hatched a plot to kill the Sultan and this report reached the ears of the Sultan, but he was so enamored of Khusrau that he paid no heed to it. Mubarak Shah paid for his foolishness when he was ultimately killed and beheaded by Khusrau Khan and his Hindu accomplices in his own palace, and Khusrau became Sultan Nasiruddin; he also married Qutubuddin's wife. However Khusrau Khan was a Hindu convert and placed his Hindu friends in positions of power and Delhi once again came under Hindu rule; this caused insecurity among the Muslim generals and chieftains. Alauddin's general Ghazi Malik waged a battle upon Khusrau Khan; Khusrau could not stand for long against the seasoned general and Ghazi vanquished him easily. He fled from the battlefield, but was caught and beheaded. Since all the male members of Alauddin's dynasty had been killed the *maliks* and *amirs* chose Ghazi as the new sultan of Delhi. He ascended the throne in the palace at Siri and took the name of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq and so started the almost century-long rule of this new dynasty. This happened in the year 1320.

-X-X-

Ghiyasuddin had been a successful and experienced general guarding the frontier of the sultanate from the Mughals (Mongols) and brought his experience to the monarchy. He paints the picture of a benevolent ruler when he decided to moderate the taxes to be paid by the ryots to the government. He wanted some grain or cash to be left over with the farmers at the end so that the produce increased year after year and more land could be brought under cultivation. The Hindus were to be taxed more so that they did not become rich and powerful and ultimately a threat to him, but also not so much that they were reduced to poverty. After a short

reign of four years Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq died in 1325 in a mysterious accident. He was coming back to Delhi after subduing Lakhnauti and was staying for the night in a pavilion built for him at some distance outside Delhi. According to Barani while the Sultan was taking his lunch a thunderbolt struck the pavilion and the pavilion came crashing down over him, thus ending his short rule.

His tomb lies in the accursed Tughlaqabad fort, built by him. The story goes that once while walking with Sultan Qutub-ud-din his general [then called as] Ghazi Malik suggested to him that a city should be built there. The Sultan jokingly replied that Ghazi should get it built when he becomes the king. As fate would have it he did and promptly commenced its construction.

I visited Tughlakabad Fort and Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq's tomb in the middle of the rainy season. With a perimeter of six and a half kilometers it was humongous in size. From outside one could see the high and imposing walls and bastions of the fort, surrounded by the customary moat. The thick walls were made of rubble masonry with a dressing of hewn stone. The outer walls had long slits in them from where arrows could be fired when an enemy attacked. Today the whole fort is overrun with vegetation and in the rainy season the lush greenery was even more conspicuous amidst the ruins of the fort. On entering the fort one could see the king's palace area to the west, recognizable by the high arched walls. On going further there was a deep step-well or *baoli* whose bottom was reached by a long flight of stairs. Unfortunately it has run dry. Towards the east of the gate was a raised platform called the Bijai Mandal, the highest point in the fort and I got a panoramic view of the entire fort from there and also spotted Adilabad Fort lying at some distance. Close to the Bijai Mandal there was an interesting, underground arched walkway with rooms on both sides, probably used for storage; it is also surmised to have been a market.

There is the well-known anecdote related to the fort, specifically to its ruin. It is said that at the time the fort was being built the saint Nizamuddin Auliya was having his *baoli* built. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq had ordered all workers to work on the fort and nowhere else, thus hindering work on the *baoli*. Nizamuddin is said to have been enraged by the King's high-handedness and uttered the curse "*Yaa base gujjar, yaa rahe hissar* (Only cattle herders will survive in this fort)". The curse is said to have turned Tughlakabad Fort to ruins in a few years' span. Even today one can see herders bringing their cattle and goats for grazing from the village situated inside the fort premises. On the other hand the *baoli* built by Nizamuddin (which lies near his *dargah*) is one of the few *baolis* not to have dried up.

The fort was linked to Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq's tomb by a raised causeway since the tomb was in a lake. Today the causeway is intersected by the busy Mehrauli-Badarpur road while the lake has dried up.

The tomb is believed to have been built by Ghiyasuddin for himself. The mausoleum was surrounded by an almost pentagonal periphery wall which was designed in the form of a mini fortress complete with bastions and crenellated ramparts with walkways. To add to the effect here also there were slits in the walls to fire arrows.

Half-expecting the mausoleum inside also to be in a state of decay like the fort, I was glad to find that it was remarkably well preserved. In the midst of a courtyard was the central, square edifice built of red sandstone and white marble with slightly tapering walls in true Tughlaqian style. It had a large, white dome sitting on an octagonal marble base topped by a red flower bud motif. There was a group of tourists inside it, shouting in turns, enjoying the acoustics created by the dome.

Each of the three entrances, to the east, north and south, had a double arch, an outer higher arch and slightly inwards a lower arch with a white marble *jaali* in place of a ventilator. Below the *jaali* was a band of white marble going all around the building. The western wall, pointing towards Mecca, was closed up as is usual, and had a white marble *mihrab* again with the double arched motif. To break the monotony of red and white there were optimal touches of black stone seen all around the tomb. The mausoleum had three simple graves inside; that of Ghiyasuddin, his wife and his son Muhammad bin Tughlaq.

For the outer periphery wall at places a red stone *chhaja* was utilized showing the Indian effect on this early-era structure. Under the outer periphery battlements in the north-eastern corner lay another set of graves, which pre-dated the mausoleum of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq.

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The two names that stand out for different reasons among the rulers of this dynasty are Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Both had long rules so that they could implement their ideas for good or bad, and their rules have been well chronicled by historians.

### **Muhammad bin Tughlaq**

Ziauddin Barani, who was also acquainted with him personally, gives a detailed account of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's reign, and some tidbits are provided by the famous traveller Ibn Battuta. Barani states that Muhammad was an erudite person, at least according to the standard of his times, and very well-read in Persian literature, but did not have the soft-heartedness of disposition and empathy that is required in a monarch. He thought up fantastic and impracticable schemes and brought out edicts to implement them without consulting his courtiers and the wise men around him. When the schemes failed he retracted them and became bitter towards his people. The people, in turn, were disgusted and frightened by his random and imperious ways and revolted against him.

Barani talks about some of these crazy plans of Sultan Tughlaq. The first project of his which started his downslide was increasing the taxes on the farmers. This led to the impoverishment and ruin of many farmers and many of them rebelled. Others left their lands and fled to the jungles in fear. This reduced the land under cultivation and caused a widespread famine, and many scores of people perished due to the flawed imperial policy. Another crazy idea of his, and the most talked about, was to shift his capital to Deogir, which was renamed as Daulatabad. The reason he chose to shift the capital was that Daulatabad was nearly at the centre of his empire and so ruling from there made sense. To accomplish his scheme he depopulated the entire city of Delhi which was at the time one of the leading cities of the East. All inhabitants of Delhi were forced to march to Daulatabad with their belongings. Not a single man or animal was left behind. This caused much pain and consternation to the displaced people, many of whom had been living in Delhi for generations. Many others died on the way to Daulatabad from the rigours of the journey. Even in Daulatabad the people were not able to come to terms with living in an alien land and suffered greatly. Later when he relocated back to Delhi, just a few were able to make the journey back to their beloved hometown. Barani says this decision destroyed Delhi and all efforts of Muhammad bin Tughlaq to repopulate Delhi, including inviting scholars and artisans to live in Delhi, were not able to restore the former glory of Delhi, at least not in his lifetime.

Next, the Sultan decided to conquer the entire world, and for this he needed money, lots of it. His fertile mind gave birth to a new scheme to generate untold amounts of money; he introduced copper currency. He issued forth a *firman* that thenceforth copper money could be used as tender, instead of gold and silver, and should be given the same value as gold and silver money. He had underestimated the ingenuity of the Indian people. Mints sprung up in every other household. So people minted money at home and paid their dues to the government with this money, and also used it for other everyday purposes. The market was flooded with copper coins minted privately by individuals. In foreign lands this copper currency became unacceptable, and even in Hindustan the value of gold *tanka* rose to a hundredfold of the copper *tanka*. Muhammad realized his folly and retracted the *firman*. He ordered all people to return their copper *tankas* to the government and take back gold and silver coins in return. People came in crowds to return the copper money, a bulk of it being counterfeit money. Barani says mountains of copper were raised in Tughlakabad and in remunerating the populace with gold and silver a large part of the treasury was emptied.

Then he started thinking up a plan to bring Iran and Iraq under his rule. For this he requisitioned three hundred and seventy thousand horses and riders and kept and paid for them. Meanwhile he was busy buying out officials in Iran. After a year, the plan had not progressed and the burden of supporting this large army was felt on the treasury, so the army of three hundred and seventy thousand was disbanded. This also impoverished him, without accruing any benefit to his scheme. His memory is still alive in India due to his erratic nature and half-baked edicts, and a politician coming up with hare-brained schemes is likened to this 'Tughlaq Sultan'. The failure of his foolish schemes made him angrier towards the populace and he became more severe on the people, thereby alienating them even further. As revolts cropped one by one all over the kingdom he went about the country quietening the rebels, and punishing them inordinately. In some cases the revolts were a

result of the distrust for the Sultan harboured by his *amirs* and fear of his irrational anger. To legitimize his rule in the eyes of his people he even tried to solicit confirmation of his rule from the *Khalifa* of Egypt but to no avail. In these disturbed years famines struck in many places due to his policies and he went thither to provide succour to his people. Several took to becoming highwaymen, and he had to subdue them and make the roads safe to use for the populace. After years of pursuing errant *amirs* and their armies he breathed his last in 1351 when on a campaign to conquer Thatta.

The renowned world traveller Ibn Battuta arrived from Tangier in Morocco and was instantly liked by the Sultan. He was appointed as the *qazi* in Delhi and writes of his life in Delhi and his encounters with the Sultan, and his narrative is more interesting than Barani's. I have used Mahdi Husain's translation for reference. Ibn Battuta's description of Delhi leaves one in no doubt that he was impressed by it. Delhi consisted of four extant cities: the first was known as Delhi itself and was what is now called as Qila Rai Pithora, the second was Siri, the third was Tughlaqabad and Jahanpanah was the fourth city and this last mentioned city was built by Muhammad bin Tughlaq. He describes the ramparts of Delhi being more than fifteen feet in width, and among other things, being used for storing grain for years without deterioration in quality. He talks of the Hauz-i-Shamsi and Hauz Khas, the Qutub Minar, and the tomb of the revered saint Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. And then he gives an elaborate portrait of the Delhi Sultan whom he describes as exceedingly wealthy, munificent but blood thirsty.

"His door is never free from an indigent person who is to be enriched and from a living person who is to be killed."

Whenever executions took place they did so at a designated gate where the body remained for three days. Another gate led to the celebrated Hazaar Sutoon or the Thousand Pillared hall where the Sultan gave audience to the general public. Its pillars and roof were made of wood, covered with beautiful paintings and patterns in mosaic.

The Sultan's expenditure on himself and his staff was about thirty-six lakhs of *tankas*. He lived a truly luxurious life. He had sixty horses fully decorated and sixteen caparisoned elephants for his own exclusive use. His throne was twenty-three spans long and of width that was half the length. It was made of several pieces of pure gold with legs studded with jewels. Several men were required to lift a single piece of the throne due to the heavy weight of the gold used. Ibn Battuta's description is replete with mention of gold, silver, rubies, etc., all the expensive things associated with the rulers of ancient India.

He mentions that when the Sultan returned to the city from a visit to the outlying regions, the entire area between the city gate and the palace was festooned to welcome him. Wooden pavilions were constructed where the singing and dancing girls sat. The street through which the Sultan's elephant passed as well as the walls around were covered with silk. Dinars and dirhams were thrown towards the congregated crowd from the Sultan's elephants until they reached the palace. Even during famines when the price of grain soared he ordered that all people, rich or poor, be given allowances from the government's granary.

Tughlaq had a special liking for foreigners, whom he honoured and bestowed with riches and appointed to positions of importance. But Ibn Battuta asserts that one of the most abiding qualities of the Sultan was his generosity. He gives the example of a jurist-preacher who was given a hundred thousand *tankas* and two hundred slaves for preaching a single sermon, and in another instance Muhammad bin Tughlaq gave a poet a thousand dinars for each verse of eulogy he had written for him.

The capricious Sultan had great love for justice and was not loathe to humbling himself in front of a *qazi*. A case was filed against him in court for killing an innocent person. He walked to the court like a common accused and had beforehand instructed the *qazi* to not show him any special courtesy; he also abided by the ruling of the court. Another case was brought against him accusing him of beating a man without reason. The *qazi* ordered him to pay recompense to the victim or let the victim beat him in return. The Sultan chose the second option and asked the victim to give him twenty-one lashes with a stick.

The Sultan's wild side is shown by his treatment of Shaikh Shihabuddin. Shihabuddin was a pious and learned saint whom Tughlaq wanted to employ in his service in some capacity or the other. The saint was not interested in entering into employment under the Sultan and refused his entreaties. The vexed King had the

saint's bearded plucked out, and then exiled him to Daulatabad. After seven years he was recalled with honour and given a piece of land for cultivation six miles from Delhi. At this time both of them were reconciled to each other. However later when Tughlaq summoned him to Delhi Shihabuddin refused to go and called him a tyrant. The Sultan had him brought to Delhi forcibly and even then he reiterated the charge of tyranny against the Sultan. As punishment for his insolence Shihabuddin was kept tied, and he retaliated by refusing to take food for two weeks. The Sultan ordered that the Shaikh be fed human excreta mixed with water. Finally the brave man's head was lopped off.

Ibn Battuta gives instances of other *amirs* and important people whom the Sultan killed for trifling reasons. He executed his step-mother on pretext of adultery and her son for treason. He killed a jurist Afif-ud-din just for calling him a tyrant in front of two other people and also these two others for not remonstrating with Afif-ud-din. In another instance he fell out with Shaikh Hood, and asked back for the money he had conferred on him. When finally the impoverished Shaikh tried to flee to the Turks he was captured and beheaded. There were two brothers from Ferghana who came to Delhi on a visit and planned to return back without informing the Sultan; the angry Sultan seized their persons and had them sawn into two.

Muhammad bin Tughlaq had a cousin Bahauddin who would not swear allegiance to him, so he sent troops to fight Bahauddin. The Emperor's troops were successful and Bahauddin fled away. He was pursued ardently, and brought back to the Sultan, his hands tied to his neck in iron. He was flayed alive and the skin was filled with straw and paraded all around. His flesh was cooked with rice and sent to his wife and children, while the remainder was put in front of a female elephant, but the poor animal refused to eat it.

A cruel way of killing people that was popular with the Sultan was to put them in front of elephants trained to kill. These elephants wore pointed, comb-like, iron objects on their tusks. As soon as a man was thrown to an elephant it rolled up the victim in its trunk and tossed him into the air and caught it on the iron sheaths that it wore. Then the victim was thrown down while the elephant placed its front foot on him. Thereafter it disposed of the victim in the manner directed by the mahout.

Next Battuta talks of his personal interaction with the Sultan and his munificence towards Battuta. The Sultan assigned to him three villages at a few miles distance whose revenue came to five thousand dinars. Subsequently he received five thousand dinars more and two more villages were assigned to him (later on he exchanged these villages for five thousand dinars) so that his total revenue was twelve thousand from these five villages.

When the Sultan employed Battuta in the capacity of the *qazi* of Delhi he fixed his salary at another twelve thousand dinars. However this payment was delayed and meanwhile the creditors from whom Battuta had taken loans were at his door (He had taken loans from them to pay for the expensive gifts he had presented to the Sultan at their first meeting, as was the custom). To get the Sultan to pay off his debts Battuta devised a scheme which was commonly used at the time. When he was about to enter the Sultan's palace the creditors stopped him in his tracks and said "We appeal to the Sultan for justice and will not allow you to enter until you pay off the debts". Then the officials at the gate inquired about the matter and reported it to the Sultan. Thereupon a chamberlain was asked to find out the amount of debt. It came up to fifty-five thousand dinars, much more than Battuta's yearly salary of twelve thousand dinars. The Sultan understood Battuta's ruse but he ordered the debt to be paid off from the state treasury.

He was also given the charge of the tomb of the dead sultan Qutubuddin whom Tughlaq respected much, as he had been in the former's service. He wanted a dome built over the tomb and had set aside ten percent of the revenue of thirty villages to be given to Battuta, to be used for taking care of the expenses of the tomb.

But Battuta was an extravagant man and wanted more from the Sultan. He wanted the Sultan to let him have the entire five thousand dinars from the sale of the villages assigned to him; he also wanted help from the Sultan in repairing the house assigned to him. The Sultan was by now overwhelmed by his avaricious demands and advised him to live within his means.

At length came the time when Battuta incurred the Sultan's displeasure. Battuta had gone to meet Shihabuddin (the one who was forcibly fed excreta) to see the cavern in which he lived. When Shihabuddin was arrested the Sultan came to know that Battuta was one of his visitors, so the Sultan ordered that watch be kept on him in the council-hall. Battuta knew that when the Sultan did this it was difficult for a man to go scot-free.

This struck terror in Ibn Battuta's heart and he decided to renounce worldly pleasures. He started fasting for days together and reciting the Quran. He gave up the post of *qazi*, went under the tutelage of a saint and started wearing the robe of a fakir. On hearing of this the Sultan's heart softened and he summoned Battuta and asked him to take up his post again, but the latter declined.

After another forty days of seclusion he was sent clothes, horses, slaves, etc. by the Sultan and he was obliged to go and see him. Tughlaq ordered Battuta to go to China as his ambassador loaded with gifts for the Chinese king. But fate had more problems in store for Battuta. After great difficulty and misfortune he reached Qandahar and from there travelled along the Malabar Coast. He finally reached Calicut, one of the great ports of the time where merchants from China, Sri Lanka, Sumatra, Maldives used to visit to sell or buy merchandise. He stayed there as a guest of the provincial ruler called Zamorin for three months, waiting for the time for departure to China. Zamorin had fitted a ship for Ibn Battuta. The time of departure came and the ship was loaded and his slaves had embarked; then Ibn Battuta decided that his party should board a different vessel called the *kakam*. Ibn Battuta had remained on shore for the Friday prayers. But after the prayer he found that the waters had become so unruly that the *kakam* had drifted out into the sea and could not be reached. Even the original ship on which his luggage and gifts for the king of China were loaded had drowned; the *kakam* crew seeing the fate of the ship sailed away with the slave girls. Battuta was left with just ten dinars in his pocket.

He could not go back to the Sultan for fear of his whimsical nature as he believed that the Sultan would be angry that Battuta had parted from the treasure and gifts entrusted to him. So he stayed put for some more months and then moved out to Maldives.

-X-X-

Many of the buildings of the city of Jahanpanah survive till this date. Some of them are Begumpur Masjid in the village of Begumpur near Hauz Khas, Lal Gumbad and Kharbuze ka Gumbad. I visited Begumpur Masjid and the first thought was to marvel at the huge size of this ancient mosque. But rather than arousing piety the mosque gave me an impression of strength. But this is true of all Tughlaqian buildings; their stark, angular architecture makes them all seem as though they are a part of a citadel. This could be due to the predominantly military mindset of the rulers in those uncertain times.

It was probably second in size only to the Jama Masjid of Shahjahanabad. But it was a derelict mosque, as no prayers were offered there by the congregation. It was being used by the people of the surrounding *basti* as a place to spend their leisure time; a group of people was having the afternoon siesta, another group was chattering away, and there was even a person who had brought his dog there for a stroll.

The entire mosque was built on a raised platform. Inside there was a capacious, flagstoned courtyard surrounded by cloisters with arched openings towards the courtyard, supported on double pillars. The cloisters were covered by domes on the ceiling; in fact there was a profusion of squat domes standing side-by-side, all around the courtyard. Due to the ravages of time some part of the ceiling had caved in.

The western wall was closed and there were 19 *mihirabs* carved in the wall. It was like a big assembly line of *mihirabs* in this factory of religion. The central *mihrab*, the most conspicuous, was of red and white stone with simple carving, again in keeping with the subdued Tughlaqian tastes. This central *mihrab* was in a tall, typical Tughlaq-style *iwan* covered by one of the larger domes, its plain *pishtaq* having tapering columns at the edges; the other three sides had shorter, less majestic *iwans*. I climbed the long staircase close to the main *mihrab*, scraping against the walls all the way, and reached the highest point of the mosque which was the top of the *pishtaq*. Standing precariously behind the top of the *pishtaq* with an exhilarating view of the area around was the high point of my visit.

At a stone's throw from the mosque was the Bijai Mandal. It is conjectured that this was the site of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's palace. This was also where the famed Hazar Sutun Hall or the Hall of a Thousand Pillars was once situated. Today it is in total ruin. One of the extant structures is a circular hall with an intact high, dome. The other surviving building is a rectangular, many-pillared, multi-entrance hall. The entrances have an elaborate corbel-arch architecture which has undergone much weathering. But it is unmistakably clear that the building must have served an important function in its time.



## **Firoz Shah Tughlaq**

It had rained heavily and the sky was pretty cloudy on that September day when I decided to go to Kotla Firoz Shah and see Firoz Shah Tughlaq's palace in the city of Firozabad which he had built during his reign. It is a fort of respectable proportions, though today it is all in ruins. Very little of the original structure, especially of the royal quarter, remains; the reason could be that it was primarily built of rubble masonry, which is inherently less durable.

The fort holds the Sultan's palace ruins and the famed Jami Masjid straight ahead of the main gate, and the Ashokan pillar and an elaborate step-well or *baoli* to the left. Behind the Jami Masjid is the royal garden at the rear end of the fort, beyond which the din of Delhi contrasts harshly with the peace of the Kotla.

Walking straight ahead from the main gate I came to an arch leading to a walkway. On both sides of the walkway were flower beds and lawns maintained by the archaeological survey folks, recreating the regal look of yore.

Most of the ceiling in the royal palace had caved in, except some rooms at the periphery. Another exception was the small, square rooms at the side of the arches which led to walkways. These had peculiar pyramidal ceilings.

On going further on I came across two perpendicular, long rows of small rooms. These rooms just had enough space for two or three people to sleep in, reminding me of the modern-day pigeon-hole flats. I guessed that these rooms must have been built for the sentries or the servants of the palace. The rooms had windows opening into the adjacent rooms, creating a natural air-conditioning system. Sitting in those small rooms for a few minutes and looking at the lawn in front and feeling the cool air passing through made me feel refreshed.

I turned left and went to the pyramidal structure supporting the Ashokan Pillar. This three-storeyed structure had a profusion of small cells with arches at the entrances; it was made especially for the Ashokan Pillar which was brought here from present day Topra Kalan, a place near Ambala. It had been originally erected more than two millennia back by Emperor Ashoka.

In *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi* Shams-i Siraj Afif explains how one of the pillars (there were two similar pillars) was brought to Delhi. These pillars were supposedly the walking sticks of the Pandava Bhim (which Afif says he states on the authority of so-called good historians), with which he used to tend to his cattle. Upon his death the two pillars were left as memorial to him until they were removed to Delhi.

To extract the pillar from the earth all the folks and soldiers from the neighbourhood of Tobra were called into service and were asked to bring cotton of the Sembal (silk cotton tree) with them. A large quantity of this cotton was spread around the pillar and the earth at its base removed. The pillar softly fell on the bed of cotton. The pillar was encased in reeds and skins so that it would not break or get scratched. Then a large carriage of forty-two wheels was prepared and with great effort the pillar was placed into the carriage. The carriage was brought to the bank of the Jumna where the Sultan himself came to supervise the proceedings. Here there were large boats waiting, and upon them the pillar was placed carefully and transported to Delhi. After being brought to Delhi the raising of the pillar near Jami Masjid is also described in some detail. The pyramidal structure was made one stage at a time. Whenever a stage was finished the pillar was raised to its level and then another stage constructed, till it reached the desired height. Then was undertaken the task of erecting the pillar. This was done with the help of a windlass. A rope was coiled around the pillar and the ends around the wheels of the windlass. These wheels were turned and as the head of the pillar was raised wooden logs and cotton were placed under it to prevent it from falling back down. Thus in a few days' time the pillar was uprighted, perfectly vertical. Over its head was raised a gilded copper cupola, which is now missing. An interesting anecdote narrates that after the erection of the pillar some lines engraved on the pillar in Hindi continued to intrigue the Sultan. Many people were invited to decipher them but none were able to. Finally some Hindus interpreted the lines as saying that nobody would be able to move the pillar until there would come a Mohammedan king named Sultan Firoz...

Climbing up to the top of the pyramid to get a closer look at the 13-metre high pillar I was pleased to see that it retained its original glossy, smooth surface even after twenty-three centuries. This was the topmost point in the fort and gave a good view of the entire fort and beyond.

Finally I ascended the steps of the historic Jami Masjid. Built in the middle of the fourteenth century by Firoz Shah it was a prominent mosque of its time. Now looking at the ruins a visitor would find it difficult to imagine it as ever having been beautiful. It stood supported on a base of many small cells, and had extensively recessed walls on three sides and was open to the east where the Jumna once flowed. The western wall facing Mecca was of course the prayer wall. It had a sizeable courtyard in the middle of which once stood an octagonal structure inscribed with the achievements of Firoz Shah.

The mosque is supposed to have been magnificent in its time. Timur Lang, when he came to India in 1398, was so impressed by its beauty that he decided to have a similar mosque made in his own capital Samarkand, and so had artisans from India taken back home. Even the Ashokan pillar impressed him so much as to extract from him that he had never seen anything like it before.

In the cells below the mosque and in the cells of the pyramid I saw incense sticks and lamps being burnt and offerings of flowers being made and applications for help written on papers. These were ostensibly made to the jinns that reside in the fort. Next to the mosque there were two rooms with multiple entrances; all the entrances had iron bars. In one of these rooms a man in traditional *salwar-kameez* and a skull cap was sweeping the floor and even here I saw incense sticks and paper applications. I approached the man and asked Me: What is this room for?

The man: It is a saint's shrine

Me: Why are these two rooms barred?

The man: *Kucch jinnadi muamla hai* (It has something to do with jinns)

Me: Have you ever seen them?

The man: No, it has not been God's will that I should have seen any. Maybe if He wills I might have to see one. I shrugged and made my way out of the fort.

-X-X-

So what kind of person, or ruler, was Firoz Shah? And what was the condition of the kingdom under him? Shams-i Siraj Afif, in *Tarikh-i-Firoz-Shahi*, mentions that Firoz Shah's father Rajab was the brother of the Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq. They, along with their third brother Abu Bakr, had been in the employment of Sultan Alauddin Khilji. Rajab died when Firoz was seven years of age and Ghiyasuddin took care of him thereafter, and trained him in the royal duties as well as the ways of royalty and the politics of state and statecraft.

Seven years later Ghiyasuddin ascended the throne and continued his patronage to Firoz. He kept Firoz around and about him so that he could become acquainted with the duties and responsibilities of monarchy. After another four years Muhammad Tughlaq Shah became the sultan and in his turn was gracious to Firoz Shah and appointed him deputy of lord chamberlain. Firoz kept going from strength to strength and when Muhammad Shah divided the administration of Delhi and its dependencies into four parts he gave charge of one part to Firoz. Thus were passed the first forty-five years of his life, at the end of which we reach the time of Muhammad Shah's death. After his death, with the threat of the Mongols looming, the *amirs* and office bearers unanimously agreed that the most competent person to succeed to the throne was Firoz. But the humble Firoz made it known that he was not very ready to accept the onerous post of monarch, and so had to be almost forced to sit on the throne.

It was the rule that on special occasions the *khutba* was read in the name of the Delhi sultan; this was to reinforce the position of the sultan in the minds of the people. Firoz Shah was not pleased with the practice of announcing only the name of the current sultan in the *khutba*. He modified the practice to include the names of nine former sultans also, from Shahabuddin Muhammad Sam (Muhammad Ghori) to Muhammad Shah. These were to be read before his name in the *khutba*.

About the city Firozabad Afif writes that Firoz decided to build it at the location of the village Gawin, by the side of the river Jumna. He filled the area with new buildings, so much so, that the land between Inderpat (Indraprasth) and Kushk-i-Shikar (at the location of the Nehru Museum and Planetarium), which were five *kos* (1 *kos* is approximately 2 miles) apart, was occupied. He mentions that the entire area of five *kos* was swarming with people, like locusts, and to cater to the transport needs of all these people there were public carriers. These carriers kept horses, carriages and mules to be hired every morning; there were also palanquin bearers

available to carry people thither at a more leisurely pace, as well as porters. The devout ruler built eight mosques for the public with a capacity of 10,000. Afif also mentions that the revenue of Delhi during the almost four-decade long rule of Firoz Shah amounted to six crores and seventy-five lakhs of *tankas*.

Firoz, like many sultans before him, was very fond of acquiring slaves and training them to help in building the empire. The slaves were acquired either as prisoners of war or presented to him by his subordinates. Many of his subordinate feudal lords used to pay the annual tribute in the form of fine-bred horses, trained elephants, gold, silver and their ornaments, raiment and also slaves (Firoz had directed that the goods brought by the feudal lords be evaluated by his officials and the estimated value should be deducted from the cash which was payable by them to the Sultan).

Thus the number of slaves increased greatly over the years, and the excess were sent to the various fiefs. They were well taken care of monetarily, but they were also educated so they were of use to the state. Some were engaged in scholarly or religious activities like reading the Holy Book, or in copying books. Others were apprenticed under traders and artisans, and 12000 slaves were thus trained. Then there were the royal guards who numbered around forty thousand; they were to be used for the Sultan's personal needs. Afif estimates that there were 180000 slaves altogether in the kingdom and they were dear to the Sultan. When the number of slaves became inordinate some of them were placed in various domestic duties like cooling of water, acting as butlers, etc.

Slaves became a separate institution in themselves. The administration of slaves was also made separate from the general administration of the state. There was a dedicated treasury for them, and a bursary to dispense their incomes and official expenses. Of course, the good days lasted for these slaves only till the reign of Firoz Shah, but that's another story.

Firoz understood that unemployment was the nest of all distress and trouble. The Sultan asked the administrative officers to ferret out all the unemployed in their respective areas and their list should be sent to him. The educated among them as well as those who knew trade were absorbed in the government administration. If a man wanted to be a slave of a particular noble or landlord the Sultan himself sent a letter of recommendation and so the person found an occupation to his satisfaction. For his army he made the rule that if an officer died, then he would be succeeded by his son; if he had none then by his son-in-law; else by his slave; if he had no slave then by his nearest relation; in case some unfortunate soul had no male relative, then by his wives.

Similarly, in his munificence he decided to give grants to needy Muslims who had daughters of marriageable age, but were not able to arrange for their marriage expenses or dowry. After an inquiry was made into the person's economic status an allowance of up to fifty *tankas* was contributed towards the marriage expenses of his daughter.

He also started a hospital for the treatment of the sick in his kingdom, and doctors were appointed, as well as free medicines distributed as per the doctors' prescription. Afif writes that there was prosperity and happiness all around during the four decades of Firoz's reign, the prices of commodities were generally low and there was never any shortage of food. The people were so contented that they forgot the rule of Alauddin Khilji, which was considered to be the golden period of monarchy.

During his reign the coinage consisted of gold and silver *tankas*, but there were also coins of smaller denomination equivalent to forty-eight, twenty-four, twelve, ten, eight, six and one *jital*. But Firoz thought that there was need for coins of even finer denominations, so that the needy and poor might be able to use their available financial resources in a more effective manner. A poor person may buy a product in the market equivalent to half a *jital* and may not get back the other half since such a coin did not exist. So he issued an edict to mint coins of value half and quarter *jital*.

As he grew older Firoz became a little orthodox in his views, and tried to live his life and rule his kingdom according to the Holy Law. In his private chambers he had all paintings with scenes not in accordance with the Holy Writ changed to garden scenes, and ensured his banner had no pictures on it. He gave up the use of metal for his utensils and started using earthenware instead. All those taxes and levies which his religious advisors at court deemed as unlawful according to Shariah were abolished by him. And he started levying the *jaziya* or poll tax on Hindu Brahmins too, which had been exempted by earlier sultans. There was stiff opposition from them,

and some of them resorted to hunger strikes, but he would not relent. Finally the non-Brahmin Hindus convinced the Brahmins to give up opposing the Sultan and also offered to help them in paying their dues. When the Brahmins finally realized that they would have to give in they went to the Sultan and begged him to reduce the tax payable. Firoz, perceiving that he had won, played the benevolent monarch, and reduced the tax to a nominal amount.

According to Afif, there was a Brahmin who would publicly perform idol worship in his house, with both Hindus and Muslims taking to worshipping the idol at his place. This was brought to Firoz's notice and he had the Brahmin summoned before him. The case was put before the intelligentsia at the court and they decreed that he must either convert or be executed. The Brahmin, of course, refused to accept another faith and was killed.

I had been to Hauz Khas area before and it had impressed me with its vast tank and the leafy deer park nearby. I decided to take another look at the *madrassa* built by Firoz Shah, nowadays popularly known as the Hauz Khas Fort. It lay in the Hauz Khas village, a place full of glitzy restaurants, teeming with youngsters. The *madrassa*, an imposing structure, stood overlooking the Hauz Khas tank, giving a beautiful view of the water below. The *madrassa* compound housed a mosque at its northern end. To the western side of the mosque was the tank and there were *mihirabs* as well as ornate windows, or *jharokhas*, to the west, looking out at the water. This was unusual for a mosque since the western wall of a mosque, in the direction of Mecca, is generally closed. There was also a long, and rather impressive, flight of stairs running down to the tank. Next to the mosque was a three-domed building. This peculiar structure was a T-shaped platform with three round domes supported by many pillars. There were steps to climb to the platform at several places; so there did not seem to be a central, focal point of the structure. Looking at it I thought that it must have been an open classroom, where probably different groups were combined for joint lectures.

Adjoining the mosque and to its south was the northern wing of the *madrassa*. The *madrassa* was a double storeyed building, built of rubble masonry, and yet, it has lasted through the ravages of time. The top storey of the northern wing had numerous pillared rooms and halls and gave a bird's-eye view of the tank. The lower storey had a line of small identical rooms with simple, arched entrances. These hostel-style Spartan rooms had a single, slanting aperture or window in the opposite wall to let sunlight inside. These must have been the rooms allotted to the scholars and students staying at the *madrassa*.

On the other end, projecting out to the west was the western wing. Like the northern wing, this wing also had a higher pillared storey, and the lower storey had the living quarters. At the point where the northern and the western wings joined lay the main attraction of the place, which was the tomb of Firoz Shah himself. The high domed, tomb chamber contained Firoz's marble tombstone along with some other graves. Outside it was a small patio with stone railing demarcating its boundary. Overall it has a pleasing effect on the visitor, but one does tend to feel, and not for the first time in all my visits around Delhi, that the tomb is a bit simple for an emperor of Hindustan. But the fact that Firoz chose this place as his final resting ground shows how important the *madrassa* was to him. The plaque outside stated that the *madrassa* was endowed by the Emperor, and scholars came from near and far. In his delightful book on Delhi called 'The City of Djinn's' William Dalrymple also mentions that the *madrassa* was well known even outside India and describes a bit of the comfortable life of the scholars living there.

In the grounds next to Firoz's tomb there were numerous small, domed pavilions of square, hexagonal and octagonal shapes. Upon looking closely in one of them I could see shallow graves in the middle. It is surmised that they were graves of the renowned teachers who had taught at the *madrassa*.

There was a period of instability between Firoz Shah's death and the rise of the Sayyid dynasty. Yahya bin Ahmad states in Tarikh-i-Mubarak-Shahi that Firoz Shah died in 1388 and the nobles and *amirs*, acceding to Firoz Shah's wish, put his grandson Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq (II) on the throne. As had happened very often in Delhi's past the new Sultan was young and dissipated himself in pleasure. This led to a concerted revolt of many *amirs* and slaves and the new Sultan was killed by beheading in the beginning of 1389. After this they made Abu Bakr sit on the throne in Delhi. Meanwhile Muhammad Khan, a son of Firoz Shah, also proclaimed himself as Sultan Muhammad Shah. He and his son Humayun Khan marched against Abu Bakr thrice but were

defeated every time. Then certain slaves of Firoz Shah under a person by the name of Islam Khan went over to Muhammad Shah's side, and Abu Bakr, unable to resist them, left Delhi. Muhammad Shah came to Delhi and Islam Khan was made *wazir*; Abu Bakr was later defeated in battle. When he came to Muhammad Shah and begged for mercy he was imprisoned, and later died. Muhammad Shah became sick and died in early 1394 and his son Humayun Khan became king with the title Alauddin Sikandar Shah but died of sickness in a little over a month and a half's time. Thereafter Prince Mahmud, youngest son of Muhammad Shah was seated on the throne, and took the title of Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah in Delhi. The real power, however, was not in the hands of the Emperor but with the brothers Mallu Khan and Sarang. In some time disgruntled elements in his party brought forth another claimant to the throne, another of Firoz Shah's grandsons, Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah at Firozabad. So again there were now two candidates clamouring for the throne. There were many skirmishes between the two factions but none could gain mastery over the other. Meanwhile the *amirs* of the outlying territories threw off their allegiance and became independent rulers. The notable intervention at this time was the attack of Timur on Hindustan, but Nusrat Shah fled from the scene before the arrival of Timur's army.

In 1398 Timur Lang attacked Delhi and Mallu Khan put up a feeble fight but he and Sultan Mahmud Shah were also forced to run from Delhi for their lives, leaving their wives and children behind.

Timur left, but Delhi remained desolate for two months after the assault. Nusrat Shah returned and captured the ruined city, but Mallu Khan came back again and threw him out; and Mahmud Shah became the sole sultan. Mallu Khan and the Sultan became antagonistic to each other and in consequence the King left for Kanauj. After Mallu was killed the Sultan returned to Delhi in 1405. Thereafter he had an uneasy reign till 1412. In 1414 Khizr Khan (he had obtained the fief of Multan from Firoz Shah) gained possession of Delhi and the rule of the Sayyid dynasty started.

## Sufi Delhi

It has always seemed to me that the soul of Delhi is Sufi. This can be seen by the large number of Sufi saints who made Delhi their abode as well as by their popularity. Sufism can be baldly described as the spiritual side of Islam, however in effect, it encompasses the entire dimension of how a human being interacts with the divine, as well as with fellow humans. The effect of the Sufi saints and the Sufi ethos of love, tolerance and brotherhood on the people of the sub-continent has been incalculable. Not just the common folk but even the greatest conquerors considered themselves lower to these men of God and would gladly bow to them. Many of them firmly believed that they would succeed in keeping their kingdoms intact only if they won the favour of the saints.

The great saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti is said to have first popularized the Sufi thought and tradition among the people of the sub-continent. He was one of the earliest Sufis to preach in India and the first Sufi saint of the Chishti *silsila* to make India his home. Born in Iran around the year 1141 he is said to have received initiation into the Chishti order from the famous Sufi saint Khwaja Uthman Haruni. Thereafter he travelled to Ajmer and remained here till his death in 1236 A.D. Even today he is revered by the people of the sub-continent as Garib Nawaz (Helper of the Needy) and Sultan-ul-Hind (Emperor of India). On the occasion of his *urs*, which is the death anniversary, people, Muslims as well as Hindus, from all walks of life converge to Ajmer Sharif to get their wishes granted or simply to offer respect to their beloved saint.

He chose his disciple Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki as his successor, thus the Chishti order moved to Delhi. He in turn was succeeded by Baba Fariduddin Ganjshakar in Pak Pattan in present-day Pakistan, who passed on the baton to the peerless Nizamuddin Auliya back in Delhi. After his death the order was in the hands of Chirag-e-Delhi Nasiruddin Mahmud, whose disciple Banda Nawaz then took the order to Gulbarga in the south of India at the end of the fourteenth century.

Stories abound about each of these great Sufis. One story says that the suffix Kaki was given to the saint because of the kind of bread that grew miraculously in the backyard of his house so that he did not need to buy it from his dishonest baker. Another says that the honorific was given due to his ability to materialize cakes of bread in his hand. Ibn Battuta's narrative says that whenever the poor or needy came to him he gave them each a gold or silver cake, and got the name Kaki. Nizamuddin Auliya is said to have predicted the death of the Delhi Sultan when he uttered "*Hunuz Delhi dur ast* (Delhi is yet far)".

Nizamuddin Auliya's Dargah is in the eponymous Hazrat Nizamuddin area of Delhi, close to Humayun's tomb. Entering the lane leading to the *dargah* one encounters a lot of human traffic moving helter-skelter. After a lot of physical effort I managed to reach the inlet of the maze which led to the tomb. There were numerous shops selling flowers, perfumes, sweets, *chaddars* (decorated sheets), all manner of offerings to be made to the saint. While passing through the labyrinth I got shouted by almost all the vendors forbidding me from going any further with my shoes on, and at the same time offering to safeguard my shoes if I bought offerings from them. Finally, close to the tomb, I bought two platefuls of flowers, for I was told that there are two saints buried there. I kept my shoes with the flower vendor. I could see the extent to which the saint had been commercialized, since the flowers were being sold at several times the normal charge. I went inside the premises and saw a magnificent domed structure housing the *mazaar* of Nizamuddin. There was a queue of men outside the *mazaar* chamber, waiting for their turn to go in with their offerings. The main chamber was crammed with devotees dispersing flowers over the tomb or offering prayers with their heads bowed. The caretaker was ushering the people out after they had spent a minute or so inside, so that the queue could move on. The chamber walls were made of *jaalis*, so that womenfolk, who were not allowed inside it, could peer at the *pir* through them. There were threads tied in the *jaalis* representing unfulfilled wishes or pieces of paper with requests written on them jammed into the lattice-work. I joined the queue and in due course made my offering of a plate of flowers to the saint and moved out.

As I came out a caretaker asked me for whom was I carrying the second set of flowers. I said I had been told there were two saints buried in the compound, and this set was for the second saint. He told me that the second saint was Nizamuddin's disciple the famous poet and historian Amir Khusro and custom required that the first offering be made to him and the second to his master Nizamuddin. Nothing could be done about it

now, so I went ahead and against custom made the second offering to Amir Khusro's *mazaar*.

Amir Khusro was a fourteenth century celebrated poet and undoubtedly the foremost disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya. He composed poetry in Persian as well as Hindi. His songs are still popular in the sub-continent, most notably in north India and Pakistan, seven centuries after they were written. A Hindustani Sufi singer would definitely have sung Khusro's *qawwalis* without which his repertoire would be considered incomplete. Khusro is also supposed to have invented the *sitar*.

While making my offering to Khusro a person (*dargah* official) sitting outside with a pen and book in hand beckoned me and asked:

"What is your name?"

"Navdeep"

He scribbled my name in Nastaliq style in a receipt-book.

"How much donation are you planning to make to the saint?"

"I had not planned on making any donation"

"Oh, (*sarcastically*) you came to the saint empty-handed, with just an offering of flowers"

I walked away from him and came back to the *mazaar* of Nizamuddin and sat down in the direction of the *mazaar*, with my back resting against the *jaali* of another tomb. I looked back and saw that the cobwebbed tomb belonged to Sahebzada Jahanara Begum, the favourite daughter of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. The irony hit me that once a princess of India, now she lay in this uncared for tomb, while twenty feet away was the tomb of one of the most revered saints of India who had lived a frugal, spiritual existence.

As I walked back out I felt that this experience was scarcely in keeping with my idea of Sufism, and for me the visit had been a bit of a let-down. The commercialization of the spiritual process in the *dargah* reminded me of the Ajmer Sharif Dargah of Moinuddin Chishti where the men in charge aggressively asked for personal donation to be made to them.

Outside, to my right was the tomb of the poet Mirza Ghalib but I was in no mood to visit it today.

The next week I went to the tomb of Chirag-e-Delhi Nasiruddin Mahmood, a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya and his successor. It lay in the Chirag-Delhi locality, evidently named after him. Though the area was a posh locality of Delhi the *dargah* itself was situated in a *basti*, and I reached the tomb after wading through a confusing network of lanes and asking half a dozen denizens for instructions, many of whom are not aware of the tomb's existence. The *dargah* did not seem to be thronged with visitors like the Nizamuddin Dargah, nor did it seem to be commercialized like it. There were three or four shops selling flowers, and I bought a plate of them for a nominal price and walked into the *dargah*. Inside I saw a large compound with a lot of tombs, most of them open to the elements, and the important ones housed in chambers. In the middle of the courtyard was the tomb of the saint Nasiruddin Mahmud. Opposite to the entrance was a small prayer room where a few devotees were offering *namaaz*. I walked around the courtyard peering at the numerous tombs and presently came to the tomb of the saint. It was housed in a many-pillared square chamber with the customary dome. I paid my respects to the saint and then settled down outside the chamber, nestling against a pillar. Even from where I was sitting I could have a good look of the tomb through the *jaali* walls. In the half hour I spent sitting there few folks came in to pay homage to the saint, and so it was altogether a peaceful time I spent there. Then the caretaker of the tomb came and sat next to me.

He said to me:

"We are renovating the *dargah*. Could you please help us monetarily?"

Me: "Don't you get enough offerings here? It is after all one of the celebrated *dargahs* in the city."

Caretaker: "Not enough to meet with the renovation expenses. Also we do not get any help from the government since this *dargah* is not under government control. The other *dargahs*, Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Dargah as well as Ajmer Sharif, those are under government control and do not lack funds. We have to subsist on donations from devotees."

I made my meagre contribution towards the renovation fund, got up and went out. I liked this quiet *dargah* more than the previous one, and yet I did not feel like I had experienced what I had expected from these two holy grounds. Especially the appeals for financial help had somehow left a bad taste in my mouth.

The tomb of the Lodi Dynasty founder Bahlol Lodhi was next to the *dargah* so I decided to take a look at it too.

The tomb did not take up much area, and it was surrounded by settlements uncomfortably close to it. The monument, though under ASI control, seemed to be uncared for. The place was dirty, full of refuse in plastic bags and the walls had been gathering moss. There was a group of guys sitting on a mat inside the tomb, drinking alcohol and gambling in broad daylight, and kids from the settlement outside were playing inside the tomb premises. Not a very comely sight for the eyes, but I was still glad I came. Looking at the edifice I thought it must have been beautiful once, as could be seen from the nicely carved tombstone of Bahlol housed in an elaborate vaulted chamber which conveyed an expression of solidity to the onlooker. Besides I could still see blue glazed tiles on some of the other tombstones in the premises, betraying its past glory, but time had weathered down the fine features of the structure.

I had had enough of *dargahs* for the time being and it took another four months before I visited the oldest *dargah* of Delhi, the Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Dargah.

Born in 1186 AD in Ferghana in Uzbekistan Kaki met Moinuddin Chishti, became his follower and following him reached India. But instead of staying in Ajmer he chose to live in Delhi, where the emperor Altamash (Iltutmish) became an ardent disciple of the great saint, and it is believed by some that the Qutub Minar was actually named after him.

The *dargah* is built in the old town of Mehrauli, a few minutes' walk from the Qutub Minar. I took the longer route from Andheriya Mor, crossed Jahaz Mahal, an ancient boat shaped monument and reached the vicinity of the *dargah* into an old market. The saint was highly revered there. I found this out when I had to ask a few people for directions to reach the *dargah*, and each one politely pointed me in its direction, at the same time urging me to pay their respects too to the saint. It was situated in an old settlement, like many *dargahs*, and as I walked to my destination I could see the settlement was not a very affluent neighbourhood, lacking even some basic amenities. Maybe this was the reason, I later thought, why there were lesser people in this shrine compared to Nizamuddin's tomb. It had not become a tourist attraction. I bought some flowers for offering to the saint at the gate, performed some cursory ablutions and went in. There was a dervish sitting at the entrance with a harmonium, singing an impromptu *qawwali*.

The *dargah* grounds included the main courtyard where the saint was buried and there were many other tombs sprinkled about; then there was the Moti Masjid, a small mosque for men, and the women's area which they could use for prayers. As I scanned the premises I came across a signboard "Please do not indulge in worldly talk while in the *dargah*", and next to it was a group of men busy brokering a deal. It was a Saturday afternoon and the mosque had not yet started filling, but there was a Hindu family from Maharashtra, come all the way to visit the saint. The patriarch, conspicuous by his clothing from the rest of the crowd, was talking reverentially of the saint in Marathi.

The main court where Kaki was buried was off-limit for women, so the womenfolk were looking through the *jaali* walls and praying to the *mazaar*, others were making donations, and still others were tying threads in the *jaalis*. While I was entering the inner sanctum one of them handed me her plate of flowers to scatter on the saint's *mazaar*. I dutifully dispersed her and my flowers and sat down in a comfortable spot with my back resting against a marble platform.

It was a cool day and I was enjoying the quiet of the place. I closed my eyes and went into a reverie for a quarter of an hour or so. When I returned back from my rumination I saw that the line of devotees was becoming thicker as afternoon gave way to eventide.

I exited the sanctum sanctorum and was heading towards the gate, walking next to a small open-air space with a few tombs. I noticed a woman sitting next to the tombs, with her back against a wall and a long-handled broom beside her. She no doubt worked as a sweeper in the *dargah*. She was nonchalantly smoking a cigarette, unaware and undisturbed by the world around her. For some reason it was this image of the woman supremely at peace which remained etched in my mind. It beautifully captured the aura of the place as well as the Sufi message 'Everybody has his own way of reaching the divine'. As I came out I already knew I would be returning to the *dargah* again.

I walked around the *dargah* to Zafar Mahal, which stands abutting it. The construction of the *mahal* was



started by Akbar Shah II, and he built the lower storey and the *naubat khana*. Later on, Bahadur Shah II (also known as Bahadur Shah Zafar) added the upper storey as family residence and also developed the huge ornate front entrance, the Hathi Gate or the Elephant Gate, so called since it was tall enough to allow even those mammoths to pass through.

Entering the Hathi Gate I could imagine how fanciful a royal welcome must have been. However once inside I found most of the *mahal* was in ruins, probably due to inferior masonry, as the inscription in the front also mentioned. Looking at the unplastered walls I could see that they were made of rubble masonry. Most of the roof had caved in giving the lower storey a rather gloomy appearance. On the far side there were children playing cricket; soon they left, through a hole in the wall, through which they had come in.

I made a precarious climb up the staircase and reached the upper storey and was happy to find that it was constructed in the characteristically fine Mughal style. This residential portion had a number of rooms with their doors opening into the central, arcaded hall. This entire hall exuded delicacy. One of the denuded walls showed that they were made of small, flattish bricks; the masonry in this latterly built part of the *mahal* was of a much better standard and so it was largely intact. The central chamber had balconies and *jharokhas* which stood just above the main gate, opening out to the street in front; the royal household could be seated there and observe the festivals and processions outside, especially the *urs* of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. The Moti Masjid built by the royal family was adjoining to the *mahal*. It could be reached either through the *dargah* or by going through Zafar Mahal. Next to the *masjid* were the royal graves of Shah Alam II, Akbar Shah II and other members. Bahadur Shah also wished to be buried here, but was destined to be buried in Rangoon after being jailed for the Uprising of 1857. From time to time there is talk about getting his remains back and burying them here, but it is doubtful this can be done since his tomb in Rangoon has become a shrine for the locals there.

### Encounter of a strange kind

Next I strolled into the Lado Sarai shrubbery which is very near the Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Dargah. This protected park has a wealth of archaeological structures. There is the Rajon Ki Baoli which is a beautiful, ancient step-well. Then there is the sixteenth century Kamali-Jamali Mosque and Tomb where the saint Jamali is buried along with an unknown person Kamali. Next to it is Balban's crumbling tomb, and further on is the domed Metcalfe's Folly, atop a mound.

An incident, funny in hindsight, took place at Lado Sarai. While I was walking through the shrubbery I noticed a guy following me and eyeing me, but keeping a bit of distance. As I moved from Kamali-Jamali Mosque to Metcalfe's Folly, a second guy started following me, and flashed a smile at me. I smiled back, but instead of waiting to talk to him I walked away. This charade continued for some time and as I walked through the shrubbery either the first guy or the second guy would be walking next to me quietly, but not unobtrusively. The sun had set early since it was mid-January and it was getting dark; I was apprehensive, thinking that the guys meant to mug me, but somehow they did not seem like ruffians. Finally, as I was approaching the tomb of Quli Khan, the second guy came to me and said:

The second guy: Hello, what are you doing here? Seems like your first time here.

Me: Yes, I just stumbled into the park, after visiting the *dargah* (Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Dargah).

The second guy: What is your name?

Me: Navdeep. What is yours?

The second guy: Sagar. So you came here by mistake?

Me: Well, I am interested in old monuments. So I read on the internet about the Lado Sarai Park, and came to see it.

*At this point I saw the first guy make a sour face and walk away.*

Sagar: Don't you know that this is a meeting ground for gays?

Me: *(that is when the penny dropped. I understood why both the guys had been following me)* No, I did not know that. I just came to see the old monuments here.

*(I tried to steer the conversation to neutral topics, but after some time...)*

Sagar: Are you married?

Me: No.

Sagar: So, are you planning to get married? Or do you have a girlfriend?

Me: Yes, I will get married eventually.

Sagar: Will you be getting married anytime soon?

Me: *(I got his drift, so, very emphatically I replied)* Sagar, I am **not** gay.

Sagar: *(His face assumed a dejected expression)* Okay, generally guys come here for other reasons.

Me: Do you live nearby?

Sagar: Yes I live with my brother just next to the park.

Me: Do you come here often?

Sagar: I come here mostly on weekends, to meet new guys.

Me: *(I cut short the conversation)* Okay. It's getting late. So I must be on my way. Nice meeting you. Bye.

Sagar: Nice meeting you too. Bye and sorry.

It was left for me to guess why he said the final 'sorry'. I saw that my legs were feeling unsteady after the strange meeting; this unexpected encounter had left me shaken. But it also made me realize there were innumerable undercurrents that went unnoticed, which made the city what it was. There were so many people like Sagar living on the fringes of the so-called decent middle-class lifestyle, always fearful of ending up on the wrong side of the law. Upon reaching home my first thought was that of being outraged at being so accosted but then I finally ended up taking the incident in a lighter vein; my visit to the *dargah* had taught me to be more tolerant of the differences among us all.

## Timur Drops By

Delhi had seen a flurry of sultans in the decade since Firoz Shah Tughlaq's death. It was the year 1398 and Firoz's grandson Mahmud Shah was the sultan at Delhi. Meanwhile far away in Samarkand Timur Lang was making plans to defeat the infidels and unbelievers, and if possible, convert them to Islam. He had two candidates in mind, India or China. As luck would have it, it was settled between him and his courtiers that they would first invade India by breaching the four defences of Hindustan, which were its rivers, its forests, its vast armies and its elephants. Part of the reason for invading India was to capture the booty from its inhabitants who were considered to have become enfeebled and unable to defend themselves. Abu Talib Husaini translated *Mulfuzat-i-Timury* into Persian and dedicated it to the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in 1628. The translation of the invasion of India, particularly Delhi, is roughly as in the following paragraphs.

As mentioned Timur's troops had one fear while attacking Delhi, namely, that of the great war elephants of Hindustan. They had heard that these gigantic creatures could lift a horseman and his horse with their trunks and fling them away....

Timur and his army had reached Delhi fully prepared to give battle to Sultan Mahmud. Timur was out with his escort of 700 horsemen to find a suitable ground where battle might be fought when he heard that Mallu Khan with 4,000 horsemen in armour, 5,000 infantry, and twenty-seven fierce war elephants was marching towards his troops. He sent two of his deputies with 300 brave Turk horsemen to fight Mallu. They charged at Mallu's forces and showered them with arrows. Later Timur sent two more regiments to their support. In the skirmish Mallu's army admitted defeat and retreated to Delhi. In the process a large war elephant was also killed...

At this point Timur mentions that since entering Hindustan he had captured 1,00,000 infidels. These prisoners had on the previous day, when Mallu Khan's forces had attacked, rejoiced heavily and cursed the Timurids. Then they had tried to break free of their bonds so that they could go and join Mallu's army. Timur and his courtiers reached the conclusion that it would be imprudent to keep these 1,00,000 prisoners on the day of war. So it was decided to exterminate all the prisoners. Timur also justifies this action as in accordance with the rules of war. But, in addition to giving his *ghazis* the command of killing the infidels under their charge, Timur issued the extra *firman* that those who were found negligent or reluctant to carry out the killings would themselves be executed. With relish Timur talks of his order being carried out. He mentions a person Maulana Nasiruddin Umar, an erudite man, who had never killed even a sparrow, now had killed 15 captives...

To allay their fear of elephants Timur asked his *amirs* and soldiers to divide the land where they had camped among themselves and to get busy digging ditches. After six hours of digging the ditches were ready. Then they cut the surrounding trees and brought them into the ditches with their branches sticking outwards. After this all the buffaloes captured in Hindustan were brought out and their necks were fastened to their feet and they were placed among the trees in the ditches (This was probably done so that the buffaloes could make a sudden charge at the elephants, to surprise them. Sharafuddin Yazdi in *Zafarnama*, which is another version of Timur's biography, states that such tactics were eventually not required since Timur gained an easy victory over the Hindustanis) ...

On the morning of the battle a Hindustani informer was caught and yielded the information that Sultan Mahmud was mounting a charge with 10,000 war horses, 40,000 strong infantry and 125 war elephants ready with accoutrements. On the elephants were seated grenade throwers and rocket launchers... When the Hindustani and Timurid armies clashed Timur's deputies surreptitiously got behind the rear-guard of the Indians and massacred them in a single charge of their swords. Around 600 were killed even as the battle began. Then the Timurid archers took over and showered the left wing of the Indian army with arrows... Prince Pir Muhammed Jahangir attacked one of the war elephants with his sword and cut off its trunk. Seeing that they were overpowered the Indians fled from the battle-front. Then the Timurid left wing attacked the Indian right wing and they were also forced to run away from the battle. Timur's army kept at their heels till they reached Delhi...

Then the Sultan, with Mallu Khan, made the attack on Timur's centre wing, but the Timurids repelled the attack well. Meanwhile they started killing the elephant drivers with their arrows and attacked the elephants. Thus

they forced the Sultan to flee to his fort...

Timur followed him to the fort and encamped there. The Sultan and Mallu Khan both escaped from the fort in the dark of the night to avoid capture. Timur sent his officers after the fugitives, and had the gates of the fort guarded to prevent others from escaping. Timur then shifted camp to Idgah near Hauz Khas (the Idgah is next to the Chor Minar) and held court. Most of the distinguished people of the city, the *imams*, the *sayyids*, the *shaikhs*, etc. came out to kowtow to him and to offer their respects. They asked for clemency for the inhabitants and surprisingly Timur agreed...

On the coming Friday Timur had a *khutba* read in his name from the pulpits of the mosques of Delhi. This established him as Emperor of Delhi ...

Thereafter Timur indulged in great merry-making and celebrating the fall of Delhi. He made expensive gifts of all kinds to his own aides and also to the distinguished people of the city. He sent his officers to collect the tax (or war reparations, or in straight words ransom) assessed for the inhabitants of the city, excepting the Muslim elite of the city...

Of course Timur did not keep his promise of leaving alive the infidels of the city, though he puts the blame of the massacre on the denizens of Delhi. The reason for the massacre was this:

Many of Timur's soldiers were in Delhi at that time; seeing all these foreign soldiers was already building consternation and resentment among the populace. A set was escorting the ladies of the harem on their visit to the Palace of a Thousand Pillars in Jahanpanah. Then there was a group out to collect the war reparations amount decided upon the city. Another band of his Turkish soldiers was out in the city to enjoy itself and misbehaved with the citizens. It had also come to Timur's hearing that a good number of Hindus with their families had entered into the city and so he had sent his men to capture these people. When the soldiers tried to capture these men some of them offered violent resistance. This incident led to a full-blown unrest among the populations of all the three cities, Jahanpanah, Siri and Delhi. The Turks retaliated by looting, maiming and killing the people; the Hindus shut their women and children in their houses and set fire to them and came out to fight. Though Timur's generals tried to calm the waters, the flames of passion had enraged the Turkish soldiers so much that they went on a rampage and continued to loot the population or kill or make them prisoners; there was no soldier with less than twenty prisoners. Timur describes the loot as immense; there were rubies, diamonds, pearls, gold, silver, other semi-precious stones, gold and silver coins and fine silks. The ornaments of the women themselves were said to be of greater value than anything else plundered. Only the Muslim quarter was left intact, all else was ravaged...

As the massacre continued many Hindus assembled at the Jami Masjid, carrying all manner of arms, and were defending themselves. They had a skirmish with some of Timur's men and wounded them. This enraged Timur who sent his generals to vanquish the Indians, and clear that House of God. The Indians were overpowered and killed by the soldiers and the surrounding areas were plundered. Among the prisoners taken by them were good artisans, skilled masons and engineers. They numbered a few thousand; they were segregated from the other prisoners and were distributed by Timur among his *amirs* and deputies. His wish was take all of them to Samarkand where he desired to use their services to build a grand capital, the best in the world...

About the sack of Delhi Timur surprisingly says that he had no wish that such an eventuality should have occurred, the reason being that the *khutba* in his name had been read in Delhi and so he had been ordained the ruler there. Thus it had become incumbent upon him that peace and decorum was maintained in the city. But it was God's will which made the inhabitants act uppity and bring calamity upon themselves.

Some historians believe the sack of Delhi by Timur marked the end of the Delhi Sultanate, others consider it to last till 1526 when Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi to herald the arrival of the great Mughal dynasty.

Timur then goes on to describe the cities of Delhi in his memoirs.

Siri was round in shape and had tall buildings, which were surrounded by fortifications. Old Delhi also was in a fort, larger than Siri. The two cities were joined by a very long wall running from one city to the other. The city of Jahanpanah was in the midst of the habitations. The three cities had a total of thirty gates. Jahanpanah had thirteen gates, seven on the southern side, opening to the east and six on the northern side opening in the western direction. Siri Fort had seven gates, four on the outside and three opening inside towards Jahanpanah.

Finally, the city of Delhi had ten gates, some opening to the outside, others opening inwards.

Thereafter Timur left Delhi and marched onwards to teach the infidels the lesson of the true religion. Timur went on to spread murder and mayhem in Meerut, Sivalik region, Jammu and Kashmir.

Timur died in the wintry beginning months of 1405 at Otrar, Kazakhstan, of cold when he was on a campaign to vanquish China. His body was brought back to Samarkand and buried in the Gur Emir mausoleum, in a steel coffin under a nephrite jade slab.

There is a fable surrounding his after-death. After Timur's burial there used to be howls heard from his tomb at night (according to Schiltberger, a German who had served at his court). These howls were so terrible and blood-curdling that the priests around his burial place were jolted out of their wits. This went on for a year, before they resolved to do something about it. It was suggested that his spirit was not at peace, the reason being that the artisans and masons he had captured and brought to Samarkand were not at rest, and this made his spirit restive. After entreaties to Timur's son these artisans were freed and as they returned to their homelands the howls became less painful and then they finally stopped.

## The Sayyids, Lodis and the Coming of the Mughals

The dynasty which succeeded the Tughlaqs was the Sayyid dynasty, the name implying that they were descendants of Prophet Muhammad. Their rule was short-lived, starting from 1414 and lasting for less than four decades. The first ruler Khizr Khan ruled in the name of the Timurid empire and so did not take the title of sultan. He fell ill and died in 1421 and was followed by his excellent son Mubarak Shah. These rulers were mainly occupied in quelling rebellion after rebellion or in levying taxes and collecting tributes from the subordinate *amirs* and *rais*; mercifully these two rulers did not spend all their time in seeking sensual pleasures. Mubarak Shah ruled for thirteen years till 1434 when he was assassinated by the party of his *wazir*. The next sultan was Muhammad Shah and very early in his reign Mubarak Shah's assassination was avenged by killing the *wazir* and his accomplices.

Tabakat-i-Akbari narrates that Muhammad Shah was again a king who was neglectful of his duties, while his empire was being encroached upon. But he had an able general in Bahlol Khan Lodi who kept things from falling apart. In return the Sultan gave him the territories of Lahore and Dibalpur and treated him like a son. After tasting success Bahlol wanted more; he wanted to be sultan. So he gathered Afghans from all around and made a strong force out of them. He waged war on Muhammad Shah and besieged Delhi, and though the siege failed, it proved that the Sultan's power was waning; even *amirs* who were placed just 40-50 kilometres from Delhi declared their independence. Meanwhile Muhammad Shah died in 1445 and was succeeded by his son under the title Sultan Alauddin.

This son proved to be a true son of his father and was just as incompetent. In 1447 he went to Badaun to spend time in leisure and was so struck by it that he expressed his wish to remain there forever. A year later he fulfilled his desire when he left Delhi and went to live in Badaun for good. This created a power vacuum in the centre and Bahlol Lodi was invited to take the reins of power. He took control of Delhi without any great opposition; Alauddin wrote to Bahlol stating that he would be content with ruling just the single district of Badaun. Thus the power passed on into the hands of the Lodi dynasty.

Once on the throne he spent a considerable part of his time in consolidating his empire and restoring the former glory of the Delhi Sultanate. He died at the age of eighty in 1489, to be succeeded by his son Nizam Khan, who was still a teenager, and took the title of Sultan Sikandar Ghazi. He followed his father's policy of augmenting the power of the Sultanate. He is also remembered for moving his capital from Delhi to Sikandra, near Agra. From this time onwards Agra started becoming an important place in the history of India. In his eulogistic account called Tairkhi-i-Daudi Abdullah expectedly writes that Sikandar Lodi was a good and pious king who did not care for splendour and majesty; his efforts were always directed towards making the life of the common man easier. He was a night worker and slept during mid-day. He heard petitions from the public at night and issued proclamations and directives to his empire.

Twice in a year money was distributed from the King's treasury to the needy. He was full of religious zeal and he destroyed the places of worship of the infidels and turned them into *sarais* or colleges. The stone idols worshipped by them were given to butchers as meat-weights. His zeal went so far that he forbade the Hindus of Mathura (after destroying their temples) from shaving their heads and beards. Those non-believers who joined the standard of Islam were rewarded with lands.

Abdullah narrates an anecdote hinting that Sikandar's death happened due to a malediction. The King had one fault, that even though he forbade his subjects from shaving their beards he himself did not wear a beard, because of sparse growth on his face. One day he was exhorted by a respected personage Haji Abdul Wahab to grow a beard. The King humoured him and said that he would wear a beard if his spiritual guide asked him to do so. Later he told his courtiers that the Haji presumed his position to be very high just because at Sikandar's court he was treated well, but that was so just out of the King's policy (of respecting holy men). If he so commanded, even one of his slaves would be treated nicely.

This disdainful speech of the King was reported to the Haji, who was one of the Prophet's descendants. The Haji cursed the King saying that the disdainful speech would stick in his throat. The King was then attacked by a disease of the throat. To get well he made donations from his treasury of wealth to expiate for any wrongdoing.

he might have committed, but to no avail. He died of the disease at the end of 1517.

Ahmad Yadgar's *Tarikh-i Salatin-i Afghana* gives an account of Ibrahim Lodi's reign. Out of Sikandar Lodi's six sons the two sons Ibrahim and Jalal Khan were by the same mother. On Sikandar's death Ibrahim became sultan but in his benevolence he also made Jalal the sultan of the kingdom of Jaunpur. A few months later Ibrahim Lodi came to the conclusion that raising his brother also to kingship was a mistake since a kingdom should be ruled by a single monarch. So he decided to go back on his agreement with his brother Jalal and invited his brother on some pretext to proceed to his court unattended so he could seize him. But Jalal had come to know of his brother's ignoble intentions and refused to come. Ibrahim also secretly started correspondence with some nobles of Jaunpur and they decided to side with him. Jalal himself had a sizeable army and was initially disposed towards fighting with his brother but then lost his nerve and asked Ibrahim to give him a smaller territory to rule in return for relinquishing all claims to kingship. But Ibrahim refused this request; he had decided to dispose of all his five brothers. Jalal then ran away to escape from his brother's deadly intentions and his army was dispersed. But finally he was captured and was killed.

Now Ibrahim began to ill-treat the old nobles of his father's time for no apparent reason. Many, including Miyan Bhoya (Bhua), who was a powerful minister during Sikandar Lodi's rule, were imprisoned. Later they were released with honour but a gruesome fate awaited them. One day Miyan Bhoya and some other nobles were sent to an underground chamber for holding a discussion and the unsuspecting lot was blown to pieces with gunpowder. Along with this barbaric treatment of the old nobles he promoted several of the young upstarts to positions of power. This led to many nobles becoming inimical to him and they formed a confederate rebelling against him. There occurred a fierce battle and the rebelling forces were crushed, but Ibrahim little realized that he was cutting the very branch on which he was sitting. There is an interesting episode narrated by Ahmad Yadgar. Ibrahim Lodi's army was planning for an assault on the renowned Rana Sanga. Lodi had put veterans like Miyan Husain and Miyan Maruf under the inexperienced Miyan Makhan, and the latter was asked to arrest them on a suitable opportunity. Husain and Maruf were aware of the Sultan's plans, but they also remembered the largesse of the previous monarch Sikandar Lodi and his father Bahlol, and so planned a ruse against Rana Sanga. Miyan Husain went and joined the enemy Rana Sanga along with a thousand horsemen. The Rana's and Miyan Husain's combined troops routed Miyan Makhan's much larger army on the day of battle. At night when Rana's army was celebrating its victory Miyan Husain went back to the Lodi army. Then he along with Miyan Maruf and 6000 horsemen gave battle to Rana Sanga's side and slaughtered them, thus showing his faithfulness towards the Lodis. Fortunately the Rana escaped with some wounds. It struck me as odd that Miyan Husain wanted to show his loyalty to the Lodis who were paying for his blood but not to the Rana who meant him no harm and with whom he had a compact, but then ideas of loyalty and integrity were very different back then.

Meanwhile the Sultan continued to kill his nobles and weaken his own position. Many were imprisoned in his dungeons, suspended from the walls. Discontentment regarding his rule spread wider. The governor of Punjab, Daulat Khan Lodi and his son Dilawar were both alarmed by the situation since they perceived that the Sultan intended to harm them too. Daulat Khan feared for his life and decided to ally himself with another ruler. So he sent his son to Kabul and called upon Babur to come and conquer Hindustan. Babur was the ruler of Kabul when he decided to fulfil his long-cherished dream of conquering Hindustan. This Timurid was the great grandson of Timur Lang and considered himself the rightful ruler of India by virtue of the fact that his ancestor had hoisted his flag on Indian soil more than a century ago.

### **A walk in Lodi Garden**

Lodi Garden is the most well-known, and perhaps, the most beautiful garden of Delhi. Situated in a posh section of Delhi the garden is a favourite of the locals for a morning jog or an evening walk, but is also much visited by people from all over Delhi. The garden gets its name from the Lodi-era tombs that dot its landscape. The oldest tomb is not of the Lodi dynasty though; it is that of Muhammad Shah of the Sayyid dynasty. The

octagonal tomb is built on a small mound and is topped by a dome surrounded at the base by crenellations and free-standing ornamental turrets. Around the dome are numerous *chhatris* which look like a miniature replica of the dome, and this gives the dome a kind of decorated look.

The inner chamber is also octagonal in shape and has eight decorative doorways. The doorway to the west, as was the custom of the time, is covered up to form a *mihrab* so that the faithful could pray right inside the tomb chamber. The judicious use of red stone in the chamber and on its doorways gives it a mellow appearance. The inner chamber has a number of graves, of Muhammad Shah and most probably his family. Surrounding it is a colonnaded walkway, almost like a porch, with the columns forming a three-arched motif between them at every face, while the side-most column takes the form of a buttress.

Leaving the Sayyid tomb, I strolled around, admiring the landscaping of the park, and watching the people enjoying the nippy weather, relaxing in their chairs, and the children playing gaily. The cold in the air and the anticipation of rain had put a certain excitement in the air; the atmosphere in the garden was carnival. I spotted the Bada Gumbad far away and walked towards it.

The Bada Gumbad group of structures sits on a platform, around a courtyard. To the left of the courtyard is a set of small rooms, which might have been a *madrassa*, or the quarters attached to the mosque which stands on the opposite side. In front is the Bada Gumbad, and in the centre of the open space is a huge, unkempt mound which looks like a grave. The Bada Gumbad and the adjoining mosque are easily the most impressive structures in the garden. The Bada Gumbad building is an almost square chamber with a gigantic, hemispheric dome sitting on top of it, which dwarfs everything else in comparison. The tomb is made of neatly cut stones of slightly varying hues, giving it a patchwork appearance, which is further enhanced by the sparing use of red and black stone on the facades.

The front and the side faces are pretty similar, with their double-storey outer appearance, which was so common at the time. There is a tall central arch at every face which has a shallow recess with a beautifully decorated corbel-arched doorway. The corbel is of red stone and is intricately patterned with geometric shapes, along with floral designs in relief. The roof of the arch has black stone around it, and the border is punctuated by squares in red stone. In contrast to the exterior the interior of the *gumbad* is pretty bare, though the great height of the domed ceiling makes up for the drabness.

The mosque next to the *gumbad* is an even more arresting sight for a visitor due to the sheer amount of effort that must have been put in building it. Built in 1494, it is a five-arched structure and arches get narrower as one moves from the middlemost arch to the sides. The middle three arches have domes above them, and there are decorative *jharokhas* at the two side walls of the mosque. The domes are topped with a many-petalled lotus motif and the base of the dome has the crenellated pattern also seen on the Sayyid tomb. The arches are profusely carved with calligraphic verse, and the middle arch is punctuated by small, neat, square slabs of red stone, similar to the Bada Gumbad.

The inside curve of the domes are beautifully decorated with colourful floral patterns while the rim at the base is filled with niches all around. The inner walls of the *mihrabs* also have profusely calligraphed patterns giving the mosque a rich and consummate look.

Opposite to the Bada Gumbad is the Sheesh Gumbad or the 'Dome of Glass', and looks like its twin structure. This building has quite a few graves inside it, but their occupants are unknown, informs the plaque outside. What sets the Sheesh Gumbad apart from the other domes, and also gives it its name, is the band of shiny blue tiles all around, a little below the dome. The part of this band just above the central arched gateway was originally imbedded with larger, square, patterned tiles.

The last important structure in the garden is the tomb of the ruler Sikander Lodi. It is made in the fashion of a mini fortress; this was not the last time I would be seeing this fort motif in a tomb in Delhi. It has a square plan with two decorative *chhatris* in front of the main gate. The surrounding wall has a crenellated parapet to keep watch, and the four corners have circular bastions for defence. Inside the boundary wall is a lush green lawn, with Sikandar's octagonal tomb in the centre. The tomb is an average-sized structure, not gigantic; even the tombstone inside is just a simple, rectangular slab. The dome of the tomb has the familiar lotus motif on its top and there is a crenellated pattern at the base of the dome, just as in the other tombs of the garden. The striking feature of this tomb is that above the gateways on the inside of the central chamber there are



gorgeous intricate patterns in blue tiles, which are pretty well preserved as compared to those of Sheesh Gumbad. Out of the eight gateways the western one is blocked to form a *mihrab*, just as in the Sheesh Gumbad. Also, following the style of the Sayyid tomb, there is the colonnaded walkway around the tomb chamber.

## Babur

Babur was born in Ferghana in modern day Uzbekistan to Umar Sheikh Mirza, the ruler of Ferghana. The burden of ruling his kingdom was thrown on his shoulders at the tender age of twelve when his father died. Early on, he won the coveted city of Samarkand, only to lose both Ferghana and Samarkand. Finally, after realizing that Samarkand was beyond him he turned his attention to Kabul. He and his horde were able to capture Kabul and he became its ruler and remained so until his death. Though Samarkand remained his life-long obsession, for the time-being Daulat Khan's invitation turned his attention to Hindustan. Besides the insufficient revenue from the hill territories under him could not match the riches of the plains of India.

The story of Babur's encounter with Ibrahim Lodi and the events thereafter, as mentioned in his diary called Baburnama, make for interesting reading. I have used the translation by Annette S. Beveridge:

The army of Sultan Ibrahim was 1,00,000 strong, and had 1,000 combined elephants in his and his *begs'* stables. This was in the beginning of the year 1526 ...

A pitched battle was fought between both the armies near Panipat, and came to be called the first battle of Panipat. For the battle Babur's army collected seven hundred carts, and these were joined together with ropes made of animal hide and between two carts there was space for mantelets where the matchlockmen could stand under protection and fire unhindered when required...

Babur's army was in a position such that the town was to the right, and the left was covered with foliage and a low-lying ditch, so that the enemy could not attack from there. The army had the cover of the carts and the in-between mantelets, and there were places left open so that horsemen could make sallies, if required...

According to Babur a critical mistake Ibrahim made was not to hire mercenaries for the battle to shore up his army; this he attributes to his avarice. He goes on to say that though Ibrahim was a greenhorn in the art of battle he did not make adequate arrangements to ensure his victory...

Meanwhile for a week or so before the battle Babur sent a small troop of men, and later a larger group of 5000 men to attack the Sultan's army in the cover of darkness...

Finally on 20<sup>th</sup> of April 1526 Ibrahim's army advanced towards the Mughals. The Mughal strategy was to have two columns going around the enemy from right and left and reach its rear, and to attack from the rear. The other parties were to join battle with them...

The left, right, centre parties along with the columns who had reached the enemy's rear rained arrows and *firingi* shots (probably shots from a swivel gun) on them. The enemy was crowded in and could neither move left nor right, and nor could he retreat...

After noon had passed the Sultan's army was defeated and an easy victory was handed to Babur. There were about forty to fifty thousand dead in half a day's battle. The remainder of the Hindustani army was reined in and the elephants were confiscated. Sultan Ibrahim was initially thought to have escaped, and a party was dispatched to nab him, but later, was found to have died on the battlefield, when his head was found...

Another narrative, maybe apocryphal, talks of Babur having gone to where the head was found and lifted it and said "Honour to your courage". He then ordered the corpse to be bathed and buried at the spot...

Ibrahim's mother was given a pargana of land worth 7 lakhs on which to subsist...

After the battle Babur sent his fliers to Delhi to take charge of the treasury to save it from being looted. A week later the *khutba* was read in Babur's name proclaiming him as the new ruler...

Raja Bikramjit of Gwalior had lost along with Ibrahim, and his family in Agra was incarcerated by Humayun. They offered, among other jewels, the Kohinoor diamond to Humayun, and so this famous diamond came in the hands of the Mughal dynasty. Its value was ascertained to be equal to two and a half days' food for the entire world ...

Now that Babur was King of Hindustan his diary talks of his impressions of Hindustan:

He admired the counting system: 100 lakhs = 1 crore, 100 crores = 1 *arab*, 100 *arabs* = 1 *kharab*, 100 *kharabs* = 1 *neel*, 100 *neels* = 1 *padam*, 100 *padams* = 1 *saang*. That the counting system accounted for such large values he took as evidence of the vast wealth of India.

Even though he had realized his longstanding dream of conquering Hindustan there were things about it that he did not like. He writes that Hindustan was a country of few charms. He did not find the people over there good looking, or sociable. They were not very intelligent, nor was there any of the Islamic symmetry in their arts and crafts. There were no good horses or dogs in Hindustan, neither good bread nor cooked food in the bazaars. He missed his grapes, musk melons, as well as the hot public baths.

Hindustan had no great gardens with running water, nor were the residences of the locals majestic enough, again lacking symmetric beauty. The clothes worn by the general people were also pretty drab.

On the plus side, Hindustan had untold wealth; the revenue from the regions held by Babur alone amount to 52 crores. Its weather, especially in the rainy season was very bracing, even though it ruined everything due to dampness or rust. Even in summer it was not as bad as in Balkh or Qandahar. He observed that there were innumerable people in India, and there was no shortage of workers or artisans of every kind.

Some interesting tidbits from his diary:

#### **Renouncing of wine**

Three years before his death, as he was advancing towards old age, he decided to forsake wine, along with many of his followers. He issued a *firman* to that effect, where he noted that while pursuing the holy war against the infidels he realized the need to wage the bigger war against sensuality, and so wine henceforth was to be renounced. Utensils of gold and silver were broken to pieces, and distributed between the poor and the needy. To show solidarity with him 300 of his followers and servants renounced liquor along with him.

The Mughals were great opium eaters, from Babur, to Humayun and Jahangir. While forgoing consumption of wine Babur nevertheless continued using opium. Besides, later, he did regret his rash decision of leaving wine taken in an impulse of piety. He wrote that sometimes the desire for liquor had almost brought tears to his eyes. He wrote a witty quatrain to express this:

By giving up wine I have lost my senses;  
Even doing my work has become difficult;  
People repent and decide to abstain from drinking;  
But I decided to abstain and am repenting.

#### **Ibrahim's mother tries to poison Babur**

Babur had kept a few of Ibrahim's cooks so that he could taste Indian cooking. The late Sultan Ibrahim's mother (called as Bua) sent for the taster and gave him poison to deliver to the cooks. This poison was sprinkled on a prepared dish and served to Babur (The cook could not put it into the dish while the dish was cooking since Babur had taken the precaution of getting all his dishes tasted by Hindustanis first). Babur ate the dish and felt sick, and vomited out the contents. The vomit was fed to a dog and the dog also fell ill. Babur zeroed in on the culprits and had the taster cut into pieces and the cook skinned alive. Two slave-women who had been working for Ibrahim's mother Bua were crushed under an elephant and shot respectively.

The poison was removed from his body using clay and other purging agents. The treacherous Bua was sent into confinement and later sent away to Kabul, but threw herself into the Indus river and met her end...

#### **Babur's death**

Babur died in 1530, four years after he had conquered Delhi. A little anecdote regarding his death is narrated. Humayun fell violently ill and was brought to Agra. The medical fraternity of the time could not diagnose his illness, so Babur turned to the age-old rite of asking for divine intervention by bartering off the wisher's most valuable possession. Babur was advised to give away the Kohinoor diamond, but he insisted on giving up his own life to save his son. He instantly fell ill, convinced that his prayer had been accepted while Humayun was brought on the recovery path. Humayun then went back to Sambhal hale and hearty and Babur died in a few days.

The story of the clan is taken forward by another few years by the narration of events by his daughter Gulbadan Begum who is the author of the Humayun-nama, compiled in the year 1587, under order from the ruler of that time Emperor Akbar. She states that before dying Babur called his courtiers and chiefs and told them that he wished Humayun to ascend to the throne after his death. He had also extracted a promise from Humayun to never harm his brothers even though they may deserve it; this proved prescient later on.

Babur's body was buried in Agra close to the present-day site of the Taj Mahal, and a handsome endowment was made for the tomb so that five times daily prayers could be recited there. Later, the body was moved from Agra and was buried in his favourite Kabul.

## A visit to Moth Ki Masjid

I had read about Moth Ki Masjid in the area of the same name. I went to visit it on a hot Saturday morning in the sweltering month of May. Built around the year 1505 during the reign of the Lodi dynasty it has a mixed architecture typical of that period. The entrance arch looks partly Hindu and partly Islamic. The story goes that Sikandar Lodi was visiting a nearby mosque when he knelt on a grain of *moth* which a bird had dropped. His loyal Minister Miya Bhoya considered the grain of lentil to be blessed by the King and planted it. Over the years the harvest from the crop earned him good money, and the minister decided to build a mosque out of the profit. Sikandar Lodi was much impressed with such show of loyalty and he himself laid the foundation stone.

The front gate was much adorned, and with a set of beautiful, ornate corbel double-arches of red stone. On the edges of the front wall were domed, hexagonal, six-pillared *chhatris*, with a lacing of blue tiles.

The compound of the mosque was strewn with fallen leaves all over on the flagstoned ground, giving it a quaint, rustic look. Standing there I could see the walls of the mosque were being shared with the buildings that had sprouted up next to it. A lone guard was sitting on the raised edge of a small tank right in the middle of the mosque. The tank was cemented up in the middle, and I later came to know there was a tunnel there whose entrance had been filled up. There were children kicking a plastic bottle in the main prayer hall and the guard was lazily chiding them while remaining seated; next to the platform on which the guard sat there were three ancient graves.

The prayer hall of the mosque had a facade of five arched doorways, each leading to its own *mihrab*. The hall was covered by three huge domes, and on looking up into a dome, I could see that the incised decoration on the roof was well preserved, which is a rarity in most monuments. The Indian touch was provided by the brackets supporting *chhajjas* on the arches. The central arch and *mihrab*, being the most decorated caught my eye. Intricately carved, the *mihrab* was predominantly made of deep red stone, with a touch of white, and just a hint of black stone on the sides of the central notch.

Inside, the ceiling was supported on a row of arches from one end to the other, almost vaulted, providing a great sense of symmetry to the onlooker. On the sides there were two door-sized openings, and above them, on the second storey were *jharokhas*. At the sides of the back-wall were two octagonal galleries protruding out like bastions. These beautiful galleries had again two storeys and had arched openings on six sides. When viewed from outside these galleries looked as if the minarets of the mosque had been truncated down to its size.

I started looking around the mosque and clicking some pictures while the guard kept looking at me disinterestedly. When I was done with the pictures I turned to him and tried to strike a conversation. He was taciturn to start with and kept giving me monosyllabic answers. But I kept talking and asked him if the mosque was still being used for prayer. He replied that it was a derelict mosque, no longer being used except as an idling place for the people living in the surrounding area.

Within a few minutes the caretaker had opened up to conversing with me and told me there were few visitors to this monument since it was relatively unknown. Among those few visitors were those three *pirs* (the caretaker pointed to the graves). I was unsure of what he meant, so I specifically asked whether he was talking about the people dead in their graves for almost five centuries, and he nodded. The three of them came to the mosque at three in the morning. The spirits generally came through the gate, but sometimes they preferred to use the *chhatris*. Our talk progressed as follows:

Caretaker: All three of them were very dark. Two were very tall and one was short.

Me: What did they do here?

Caretaker: They just prayed and went back. I have been stationed in the past at other monuments too, and have seen similar happenings there. All caretakers at such locations know that there are pathways they must avoid between 2 and 4 in the morning. The spirits need to be shown respect.

Me: Doesn't it unnerve you?

Caretaker: I am used to it now. I was once guarding a monument and there was a *pir's* grave there. Somebody had placed a ten-rupee note as offering to the *pir*. I pocketed the note thinking it was of more use to me than to the saint. At night I was lying down somewhere near the grave and I could sense small pebbles being thrown at my back. Something told me I should give back the tanner I had taken from the grave and so I removed the note from my pocket and threw it right there and left. The next night again as I was resting somebody started throwing pebbles at me. This time I walked to the grave and respectfully placed another ten-rupee note at the grave and was left in peace from then on. A few days later I was posted at another place and I could feel an invisible presence around me. I promptly asked the saint "*Pir Baba*, I guarded you (your grave), won't you guard me in return?" Right away I felt the unknown presence leaving the place. Now, he has become my patron *pir*. Whenever I feel apprehensive while on duty I call out to him. Through his help I have educated my children. Both have now gotten decent jobs through his blessings.

I was still trying to make up my mind whether to believe the guard's fantastic words or take them as mere chatter when another man who looked to be in the mid-forties walked in. The man had unkempt grey hair and beard and was wearing old, faded but fairly clean clothes, though his shirt had the upper two buttons missing. He seemed to be very friendly with the guard and announced that he was going to sleep for an hour on the platform in the middle of the courtyard. The man seemed to be an inveterate chatterbox and kept talking to the guard intermittently while lying down when the guard told him that he had been talking to me about the mosque. I had been trying to gauge the man till then but at this point I gave up as he broke into a poem in pure Urdu. After finishing his poem he spoke to me in chaste English:

Second guy: I have been living in this area for the last 35-40 years. I sometimes sleep in the mosque, but generally I do not care. There are times when I even sleep on the bench in the park outside.

Caretaker: I was telling him about the supernatural occurrences I have seen.

Second guy: Oh! And what about these three guys (pointing to the graves). Even they come here on some nights. I swear, I have really seen them once. They came at around three in the morning. The spirits definitely come to their favoured places on Fridays.

(*The caretaker nodding at him...*)

Second guy: Around 30 years back I was sleeping in one of the *chhatris* at night when I got pushed aside forcefully. A voice spoke to me "Don't you know you are supposed to leave these pathways vacant at night?" At another time I was sleeping on a bench in the park nearby and deep in the night I woke up to find an ethereal, saintly figure beckoning me towards him. He gestured to me to bow my head so he could bless me. I did so, and when I looked up again the phantom had vanished.

Things were beginning to get a bit eerie when my stomach reminded me it was past lunch time. I thanked both of them for the interesting conversation and went out. I still could not understand what to make of the strange things they told me, but I decided to go to the other monuments where the caretaker said he had seen supernatural phenomena.

## Humayun and Humayun's Tomb Complex

When Humayun became the emperor the Mughal empire was just taking roots in Hindustan and many chiefs did not consider the Mughals to be the rightful rulers of the country, and had sympathy with the Afghan rulers. Humayun ruled for about a decade, but could not match his father's military prowess, and lost his kingdom to Sher Shah Suri. Meanwhile he also had to defend against the manoeuvres of his brothers, most notably Kamran Mirza, to dethrone him.

A source of information on Humayun is Abbas Khan bin Shaikh Ali Sarwani's *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* which is the life story of Sher Shah Suri written at the behest of Emperor Akbar. Suri was born as Farid Khan in a humble family that came from the region of the Afghans during the time of Bahlol Lodi, and was a self-made man. Once while hunting he killed a tiger and thus earned the title 'Sher Khan'. Upon entering manhood Suri kept growing in strength and conquering increasingly more territory. Initially he was conciliatory towards Humayun and expressed contentment in being his vassal, but Sher Shah's growing distrust for Humayun finally made him take on the Emperor in battle.

In *Tabakat-i Akbari* the historian Nizamuddin Ahmad writes that the decisive battle was fought between Humayun's and Sher Shah Suri's forces on the banks of the river Ganga at Kanauj, in which Humayun's army was routed. This was in the month of May 1540.

An interesting anecdote shows Humayun to have been of a superstitious bent of mind; while fighting with Sher Shah he saw supernatural beings fighting against his army and turning back his horses. He took it to be an omen that God was on the side of the Afghans and fled from the battlefield.

He fled to Agra but Sher Shah being in pursuit, he went from there to Lahore. From Lahore he and his troops wandered around in Sindh and at length went to Umarkot near Thatta. The illustrious son was born to Emperor Humayun in October of 1542 whom he named Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar. Finally they crossed over to the territory of Sistan which was under Shah Tahmasp of Persia. Humayun spent time there as the Shah's guest and came back with Persian soldiers to take Kandahar, and subsequently Kabul from his brother Mirza Kamran. But his hostile brothers Kamran and Askari would not rest in peace and there were continual fights to regain control of the territory.

Kamran crossed over to Hindustan and Humayun followed suit towards the end of the year 1554. Kamran was finally captured and sent to Humayun, who, under pressure from his nobles, had to blind Kamran. He was forced to go back to Kabul, but then learnt of the dissensions between the Afghans after the death of Sher Shah Suri; Humayun wanted to grasp this opportunity of getting back Hindustan under his power. As he marched back into Hindustan again Lahore, areas of Punjab, Sirhind and Hisar, all fell into his hands without much exertion.

At the time Delhi was held by Sikandar Afghan a nephew of Sher Shah Suri. He gave fight to the Mughals. He marched up to Sirhind with his forces which were four times in number as compared to the Mughals. Akbar had also been sent by Humayun to join his forces in Sirhind. In the ensuing battle Sikandar lost and he fled to the Siwalik mountains; he was down but not out. He would rear his head again and try to win back his kingdom. Humayun's forces then captured Delhi in 1555.

A year later Humayun was dead in Delhi in a freak accident. *Tabakat-i-Akbari* describes that this happened in the Purana Qila or Old Fort that he and Suri had built. He was in the building known as Sher Mandal which was being used as his library. He had gone up to the roof and while descending he heard the call for prayer. He sat down on the steps to pray. When he got up again his foot slipped and he fell down the staircase of his library. The next day he left for his heavenly abode.

Gulbadan Begum's account of her half-brother's life is a bit bland, but has some nuggets describing Humayun's personal life and the kind of person he was.

The first incident is about a water-carrier who had saved Humayun's life when he was drowning in the river. Humayun was so grateful to this person that he put him on the throne for two days. All *amirs* were made to

genuflect before him and he was able to enjoy all the perks of being a king and exercise all the power that a monarch wields over his realm. This reminds me of the fabulous stories of the kings of long back and their whimsical ways.

The other incident showing his soft and peaceful side relates to the time when Humayun and his band were running from Sher Shah Suri. The Emperor had no horse fit for his wife Hamida Banu Begum, and he asked one of his lieutenants to give up his horse for the Queen, but he refused. The Emperor then decided to give her his horse and himself ride on a camel, before another person offered his mother's horse in the service of the queen.

Now, another Afghan king named Sultan Muhammad Adali, when he had heard that Humayun meant to invade Hindustan had sent his trusted advisor Hemu with a force to Agra and Delhi. Meanwhile Adali himself was killed in another battle.

After Humayun's death Akbar had to contend with Sikandar Afghan as well as Hemu. Hemu approached Agra with a large force and the Mughals unable to fight the huge army had to vacate it. Then Hemu went towards Delhi and gave fight. His troops were initially defeated on the day of the battle, but Hemu's tactic was that he had a reserve force which was subsequently brought out and the Mughals were routed. Upon winning the throne of Delhi he styled himself Raja with the title Bikramajit. His huge army consisted of 1500 elephants. Upon hearing of the loss of Delhi Akbar himself went to Delhi to fight Hemu. In the battle that followed initially Hemu's artillery division suffered some reverses. He rallied around and advanced on a fierce elephant against the Mughals. During the fierce fighting an arrow pierced his eye and came out of the back of his head. On seeing this his army lost heart and retreated in disorder and Hemu was captured, and later put to death by Khan-Khanan Bairam Khan and so his short rule came to an end, and Delhi came under the Mughal rule. The other adversary Sultan Sikandar Afghan had defeated Khizr Khan, Gulbadan Begum's husband, who had been sent to tackle him; the Emperor Akbar then had to set out to Jalandhar to defeat this foe. But Sikandar was unwilling to fight him and again retreated to Siwalik Hills. He went and settled inside the fort of Mankot and Akbar's forces laid siege. At length Sikandar timidly sued for peace which was accepted.

### **Humayun's Tomb Complex**

Humayun's tomb complex is one of the most beautiful heritage structures in Delhi and seemingly one the most popular today. It lies at one end of Lodi Road, the Safdarjung tomb being at the other end. The entire complex includes many structures like Isa Khan Tomb and Mosque, Afsarwala Tomb and Mosque, Arab ki Sarai, and of course Humayun's own mausoleum.

I first went to Isa Khan's 16<sup>th</sup> century tomb which was enclosed in its own eight-sided boundary wall. The wall had a crenellated walkway and bastions forming a mock fortress. He was a noble of Sher Shah Suri, and the tomb was built before Humayun's. This octagonal tomb resembled very much the tomb of Muhammad Shah in Lodi garden, built a century earlier. It had the same dome design where the dome was surrounded by *chhatris* which were miniature replicas of the dome, the same corbel arch at the entrances to the central chamber, the eighth-sided walkways around the central chamber as well the *mihrab* on the west wall. However unlike the tomb at Lodi garden this one had a dedicated mosque too. The three-arched facade of this mosque had a dazzling red sandstone dressing around the central arch crowned by a big, almost hemispherical dome with striking *chhatris* at the two sides. A deep well situated on its porch gave it an odd, rustic look.

Before reaching the west gate leading to Humayun's tomb I took a right turn and entered the grand Arab ki Sarai Gate, leading to a lawn.

Once in the lawn I bypassed Afsarwala Tomb, and kept walking till I reached Arab ki Sarai. It is situated at one side of the grounds and is missed by almost all visitors. I could not find much information about it other than that it was built by Humayun's widow Hamida Banu Begum, Akbar's mother, to house the Persian craftsmen who came to build the tomb. It is in ruins today. Compared to the bustle around the other parts of the complex in this enclosure there was an eerie silence. There were remains of rooms upon rooms to house the artisans on one side and what seemed like warehouses lay further on, and there was also a small mosque at the end. Another section opened to its right, with three simple graves. Finally to the left and near the entrance was a

step-well which seemed to not have been cleaned since centuries, as the still water was a dirty, mossy green. Today this *sarai* looked like certainly the less glittery relative of the other more showy edifices found in the complex, but then history is not just made up of stories of doings of kings, the toiling commoners have as much of a role to play in shaping it. But my main interest in coming to the *sarai* was that I had heard rumours of its step-well being haunted. As I started to climb down the stairs of the step-well a guard came running towards me, frantically waving his arms, and asked me move back. I remonstrated, and asked him the reason for calling me back, but he just kept saying the water was too deep. I had no option but to retreat.

I retraced my steps to the west gate and entered the premises of the garden tomb of Humayun.

The first impression of the tomb on me was the absolute beauty of it. It stood on a wide square platform consisting of rooms with arches recessing into entrances, seventeen arches on each side. I peered into some of the rooms and found graves of other Mughals. There are over a hundred Mughals buried here after Humayun; the reason could be its proximity to the Nizamuddin Auliya *dargah* since it was thought of as a privilege among the royalty and nobility of those times to be buried close to revered saints. Some of the more famous names are those of Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb's son Muhammad Azam Shah, and other emperors like Jahandar Shah, Farrukhsiyar, Rafi-ud-Daulah, Rafi-ud-Darjat, Ahmad Shah and Alamgir II.

There were steps in all four directions leading up to the platform. The main structure containing the cenotaph had four identical facades. The huge mass was predominantly made of soothing red sandstone and white marble, with deft touches of buff and black stone around the arch tops.

The front face had a troika of two-storeyed recessed arches or *iwans*, the middle arch being higher than the other two. On the top of the arch on both sides was the six-sided star motif set against buff-colour stone. The lower storeys of the arches' recesses further had prominent *jaali*-work while the upper storeys had galleries. On top of the middle arch there were two small, domed *chhatris* side-by-side, while the side arches each had a single, larger *chhatri* on top of them.

The central chamber housing the white-marble tombstone was octagonal in shape. It had been repainted in red and white from the inside during conservation. On four of the eight sides this room opened into outer octagonal rooms, while every one of these outer rooms in turn opened into an outermost chamber housing other gravestones. All these outer chambers in this maze of rooms had *jaalis* instead of walls to let in air and light. In fact the *jaalis* had the dominant role in selectively letting light inside, and together with the high, domed roof, they gave the central chamber a slightly other-worldly look at the approach of dusk.

On the top there was the very elegantly, almost to the point of being sensuous, rounded dome, I felt the most beautiful one in Delhi, covered with white marble, thus setting it apart from the hemispherical domes of the earlier eras or the bulbous domes later on. It was topped by a humongous finial measuring 18 feet. I wondered how the original builders must have gotten the heavy metallic thing to the top without breaking or chipping the dome.

I looked around from my vantage point and noticed how beautifully the garden complemented the tomb; the tomb would have been much less impressive without the surrounding greenery. The garden was based on the Char Bagh concept showing the growing Persian influence on the Mughals at the time. The layout of the garden was a large square area divided into thirty-six smaller squares, six squares along each side. Each of these smaller squares was covered with lush-green grass and flowers or trees bearing fruit. The middlemost four squares formed the base on which the mausoleum stood. In between the squares were walkways bisected by channels of running water entering into pools with fountains.

After I had seen the magnificent monument I was strolling along the Char Bagh and sat on a bench under the shade. I could see a very attractive lone structure at one end of the grounds near me. I walked to the building and read the inscription:

"Barber's tomb-

Folklore refers to the building as Barber's Tomb...The tomb has within it the ornamental cenotaphs of one male and one female..."

So it was an unknown tomb, but it was a pretty grand building with its large dome, high recessed arch and blue tiled *chhatris*, a monument in itself, and I thought that calling it Barber's Tomb seemed rather misleading.



Before wrapping up for the day I walked from Humayun's mausoleum to Mirza Ghalib's tomb close to Nizamuddin Auliya Dargah. But it turned out to be a very simple grave. Lately a small marble enclosure had been constructed on top of the *mazaar*. Somebody had covered the tombstone with a green cloth and placed a few red roses on top, just as they did for a saint. The area around the tomb was empty, except for a guard having his lunch and strangely, a friendly peahen roaming around nonchalantly; it was clearly not much frequented by visitors.

But next door to Mirza Ghalib's resting place was a hidden gem, the beautiful Chausath Khamba.

As I kept on uncovering old, hidden monuments in Delhi I realized there were many more I had not even heard of yet. Since Delhi was the capital of most empires for the last thousand years there is a tremendous amount of history around it, mosques, temples, tombs of saints, mausoleums of kings as well as tombs of many nobles, which are sometimes even grander than royalty. Chausath Khamba was one of those gems. This was the mausoleum of Mirza Aziz Kokaltash who was the son of Maham Anga, Akbar's wet nurse. It was built of white marble and was so called because of the sixty-four pillars that supported the twenty-five domes between them, with ten graves interspersed around. The walls were also mostly white-marble *jaali* to match the roof and floor; this profusion of white stone which reflected the sunlight perfectly all around gave the tomb a mesmerizing look.

The structure had just been restored after years of painstaking effort. The notices hung in one corner informed that the monument had undergone deterioration over the centuries. The rain water seeping through the roof had corroded the iron pegs holding the domes together; the expanding iron had in turn caused cracks in the marble all over the structure, leading to the weakening of the tomb. During the conservation effort each marble block was dismantled and repaired. The rusted iron pegs were removed and replaced by non-corrosive ones, and the removed marble blocks were finally set back in position. The structure looked as good as new and it was heartening to see such meticulous conservation efforts being undertaken to save India's heritage from being lost.

## Agra - The Reigns of Akbar the Great and Jahangir

Agra, being the capital of several kings before Shah Jahan shifted base to Delhi, could not be ignored. Besides the fates of the two capitals Delhi and Agra were often tied up together in history.

A description of Agra in the seventeenth century is to be read in Francois Bernier's narrative "Travels in the Mughal Empire". He says that Agra was more spread out than Delhi, and had plenty of mansions built by nobles and the rich gentry. Shahjahanabad had a planned layout but Agra generally had an unplanned formation with narrow, sometimes winding, roads. Agra had more of a rustic look with green, verdant gardens around the mansions of the nobles, and Bernier thought it gave the place a very pleasing look, especially in the sweltering summers. But Bernier also says that for all beauty that they possessed Delhi and Agra could not surpass his native Paris.

Tabakat-I Akbari states that the Agra Red fort was started in the tenth year of Emperor Akbar's reign, that is, in the year 1565. The fort was to be made of hewn stone to make it a strong structure. It took just four years to complete. The historian gushes that the fort had no equal. Its walls were 10 *gaz* (about 30 feet) in thickness and were 40 *gaz* high. There was a moat around it which was filled by diverting into it the water from the river Jumna. It took 3 crores of *tankas* to build it.

Emperor Jahangir in his memoirs describes Agra as settled on both sides of the river Jumna. On the east side it was one *kos* in length and half a *kos* in breadth with a 2.5 *kos* circumference. To the western side it was more populated with a circumference of seven *kos* and breadth of one *kos*. Jahangir also says contrary to Tabakat-I Akbari that the Agra Red Fort took 15-16 years to complete and it cost 35 lakhs of rupees.

A Londoner called Ralph Fitch had visited Agra and Fatehpur during Akbar's time. He notes that Agra was a great and populous city which had fair and large streets. It had a strong castle with a ditch. There were many Moors and Hindus there. He went to Fatehpur where the King held his court. This was greater than Agra but he did not find it so fair. The King had in these two cities a 1000 elephants, 30000 horses, 1400 deer, 800 concubines and tigers, buffaloes for fighting, cocks and hawks. He also asserts that Agra and Fatehpur both were bigger than London. Between the two cities on the entire way there was a market for victuals which made the traveller feel he was still in the town. About the King he mentions that nobody could enter his house except for the eunuchs who guarded his women.

When Humayun died his son Akbar was crowned emperor, but the Mughals at the time were just beginning to get a toehold again in Hindustan after having been ousted by Suri. When Akbar came to the throne over successive years he had to re-build his empire in Hindustan with conquests of Gwalior, Jaunpur, Malwa, fort of Chunar and Chittor fort in Rajasthan, Ranthambore, Kalinjar, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Gujarat, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa.

Jahangir describes his father as being of middle height, with a wheatish complexion. He had black hair and eyebrows and a broad chest, and long arms and hands. On the left of his nose he had a fleshy mole, the size of half a pea, which was considered to bring good fortune. His voice was very loud and had a kind of richness to it. Many sons were born to Akbar but none had survived. A distraught Emperor then visited Shaikh Salim Chishti at Sikri, and this saint assured him that he would have not one but three sons. When one of his wives became pregnant he left her with the saint. He also started building activity near the saint's monastery while the saint also built a new mosque and monastery. Sikri was renamed as Fatehpur, and mansions and a bazaar sprung up; a new town started emerging. Meanwhile a son was born to the Emperor at Salim Chishti's house in 1569 whom he named Sultan Salim Mirza, after the saint's name; this was the heir to the throne. There was great rejoicing and festivities went on for a week. The Emperor in his largesse distributed gifts to one and all and set prisoners free. The Emperor then made Fatehpur his default home and built some more magnificent buildings, and Fatehpur now became a city. It is famously said that after Prince Salim was born the Emperor walked from Agra to Ajmer to pay his respects at the shrine of Ajmer Sharif (In Tarikh-I Badauni the historian Badauni says that around the year 1573 fine palaces were built on the road going from Agra to Ajmer and milestones erected and wells dug at a distance of one *kos*). Meanwhile the saint Salim Chishti's bounty was not over and another

son was born the next year and was named Murad. The third son was born in the seventeenth year of his rule in the house of the pious Shaikh Daniyal and was named Daniyal after him.

The Emperor Akbar had a curious trait that though he had not only had no formal education, but was also illiterate, yet he took great pleasure in being in the company of erudite and scholarly men. He spent considerable time listening to discussions on matters of science, history, and religion, and keenly imbibed lessons from them. He ordered his architects and builders to build in the royal garden a place to stay for Sufis and holy men. Thus an edifice called the Ibaadat Khana was erected along with the tank called Anoop Talao. When these dignified folks were invited into the Ibaadat Khana many among them took dudgeon regarding the seating arrangement and who would get more respect than the other (since the seating arrangement also signified the rank of the person). Thus the building was divided into four halls. The western hall was reserved for the *sayyids* or other exalted people, the *ulema* and other religious men sat in the southern hall, while *shaikhs*, the men of godly experience, sat in the northern hall. The eastern hall was for the nobles and such-like who shared Akbar's interest in discussing these matters of importance. The Emperor is known to have spent his nights on Fridays or on Sabbath days or other important days in these chambers, going from one hall to another in turns. Badauni says a lot of perfume was used up and bundles of money distributed among these learned men.

The religious company kept by the Emperor was a great cause of consternation to the historian Badauni. There came a person called Mullah Muhammad of Yazd in Iran and grew near to Akbar; he tried to fill Akbar's mind with nonsense against the Prophet's companions and also tried to make the Emperor become a Shia. But Badauni reserves his anger for Birbal, whom he calls 'that bastard', and for Abul Fazal (Birbal and Abul Fazal were two of the nine gems or *navratnas* at Akbar's court) and Hakim Abdul Fateh. Their conversations with the Emperor filled him with ideas of skepticism for his religion and the miracles described in the holy books. As he heard more and more from these people his thoughts began to stray from his religion and he started questioning the religious practices of praying daily, and the fasting. Poor Badauni laments that the Emperor's mind now accepted reasoning instead of religion; he eagerly sought the truth.

In five or six years after he started these discussions on religion not much trace of Islam was left in him. Being a Muslim himself he was more interested in hearing the opinions of people belonging to other religions. Slowly his belief system started accepting the fact that there were right thinkers in every religion and all religions had something to offer, and Islam was not the only true faith. His mind started accepting principles of other religions which worshipped the natural elements. The historian goes on to say that the Emperor was even willing to listen to criticism of his own religion in order to get to the One Truth. The liberal-minded Emperor entertained Christian missionaries. He even lent his ear to Birbal's exhortations that the natural elements like water, air, stones, trees and especially the Sun needed to be worshipped as being the giver of life. He had the epics of Mahabharat and Ramayan translated into Persian. The Emperor started wearing clothes of a particular colour to match the constellations overhead and also started chanting mantras. He even countenanced meeting with the fire-worshipping Parsis and had the sacred fire transferred to his palace where it was kept burning always. The historian Badauni is at the end of his wits when he asserts that the Emperor came to the court wearing a *tilak* on his forehead, and with the sacred thread tied around his wrist in typical Hindu fashion. So this illustrious emperor of India stands in stark contrast to some other members of his dynasty like his grandfather Babur who styled himself a *ghazi* and particularly his great-grandson Aurangzeb who was probably the most staunchly religious emperor ever.

Finally the Emperor's zeal for religious and meta-physical discussions culminated in his announcing his own creed called Din-i-Ilahi or God's Faith. Many of his chiefs renounced Islam and joined this new faith, probably to keep the Emperor happy.

S. R. Sharma in his book "Mughal Empire in India" gives some of the observances of the followers of this faith. When the members met one of them greeted by saying Allahu Akbar and the other answered by saying Jalla Jalaluhu. This greeting reminded men of their origin and kept God in their reminiscence. Members of the creed abstained from eating meat. They were also not allowed to use the utensils that were used by people handling meat, like butchers or fishermen. Members could not have relations with pregnant, old, and barren women, or

with girls who had not yet attained puberty.

Akbar was convinced that after a millennium of the birth of Islam a new era or the Ilahi Era was dawning, thus the new coinage showed this era. A set of regulations was promulgated. Drinking of wine was allowed but only for health reasons. The prostitutes were housed in a separate quarter called Shaitanpura or the Devil's City. Officials were appointed to write down the names of people who frequented the place or took the prostitutes home. People were allowed such relationships as long as toll was paid. Interestingly he banned the slaughter of cows since they are holy to the Hindus. The Emperor himself even gave up beef, garlic and onions. He prohibited marrying one's cousin or near relatives since it destroyed the feeling of mutual love. Boys could not marry before 16 and girls before 14 as he believed such premature marriages gave birth to weak children. No man would marry more than once except in cases of proven barrenness. Widow re-marriage was allowed and the custom of *sati* was discouraged. Forcible conversion or conversion under duress was not allowed. Needless to say all these rules were not received kindly by the orthodox people of the time but this did not deter Akbar from his course.

Sharma dwells on the other interesting aspect of Akbar's religious policy which was his interaction with the Portuguese. Akbar met them for the first time during his campaign in Gujarat in the early 1570s. He was much taken by these strangers and wanted to know more about their religious beliefs. In 1579 he sent an embassy to the Portuguese in Goa asking them to send him two learned priests so he could know more about Christianity. A mission of Jesuit priests was formed and sent to Fatehpur. This was around the same time the Ibaadat Khana was built and Akbar was keenly researching the different religions to decide the inclination of his religiosity. The priests went there with the intention of converting Akbar to Christianity and thereby gaining a signal victory in their mission. This would mean that many inhabitants would follow their King and turn Christian. The King treated these evangelists very well and also asked Murad to take lessons in Christianity from the Jesuits. Abul Fazl was given the charge of translating the Bible. The King publicly revered and kissed the image of Jesus but did not talk of converting to Christianity. Thus the mission returned back to Goa. Then in 1590 a second mission was invited but that also ended in failure. In 1594 a third mission was invited by Akbar and was again received with much respect. With his cosmopolitan outlook Akbar even allowed them to start a school where some of the nobles' children were admitted. Later the priests were able to extract permission from the King to proselytize his subjects without any danger to or constraints on their selves. The priests did not give up even after all these years in trying to convert the Emperor to Christianity and wanted to convert him even when he was on his death-bed, but were not able to speak to him due to the surrounding nobles.

Tabakat-I Akbari talks of the famous land reforms undertaken during Akbar's regime, where one of the measures taken by the Emperor was to increase the land under cultivation since taxes on agriculturists formed the bulk of the revenue for the state (Sharma mentions that land revenue alone in 1579-80 was 90,744,000 rupees). In 'Mughal Land Revenue System' Sundaram mentions that Akbar ordered his collectors to not collect *jizya* or poll tax from the non-Muslims, which was a sore point for the Hindus.

Akbar's government took one-third of the share of a farmer's produce excluding that from fallow or less productive land as taxes. As the percentage taken as tax by Akbar was more than that enjoyed by earlier kings Akbar abolished twenty-nine other taxes which had existed since earlier days. In addition the duty on manufacture was reduced from ten to five percent.

Akbar was the first Mughal ruler born in India and so could relate to Hindustan in a way in which his predecessors could not; besides they were more involved in subduing the country than in governing. He is one mediaeval emperor who stands out in history as an example of an inclusive monarch. He is also known to have laid the stable foundation of the Mughal rule in India which enabled it to last for more than three centuries, for a long time after the rot had set in.

The last years of this sovereign's reign were not smooth sailing. He had lost two of his sons, Murad and Daniyal, due to their excessive drinking. Sharma writes that the surviving son Salim had turned rebellious. In 1598 Akbar had left for his campaign in the Deccan and had left Salim in charge of the capital. When in 1600 Bengal

revolted Salim was required to go there but he remained at Allahabad and took for himself the revenue of Bihar amounting to 30 lakhs of rupees. In 1601 when Akbar returned from the Deccan to Agra Salim was also proceeding to court with 30000 horsemen. Akbar forbade him from coming to Agra and gave him Bengal and Orissa to rule. A few months later in 1602 Salim again wanted to come to Agra with 70000 men, but Akbar still forebore his brazen behavior. Salim continued living in Allahabad and even struck coins in his own name. When the Emperor could take this contumacy no more he asked Abul Fazl for advice. Abul advised stern action and offered to bring the errant prince bound to Akbar. But this *navratna* of Akbar's court was assassinated before he could complete his task. In his memoir Jahangir confesses to having Abul Fazl killed. In justification the memoir says that there was a break between him and Akbar and it was necessary to keep Abul Fazal away from the court so that the estrangement between father and son did not worsen. The Emperor was livid with Jahangir's conduct but his love for his son made him swallow even this bitter pill.

A rapprochement was tried and Akbar placed his turban on Jahangir's head in public thus affirming him as the heir. Finally Salim accepted the government of the western provinces which had been under Daniyal in 1604, but remained in Agra until his father's death. On his death bed Akbar indicated to his ministers to accept Salim as the next emperor.

The Flemish writer De Laet writes that after Akbar's death his treasure was counted and amounted to 34 crores 82 lakhs 26 thousand 3 hundred and 86 rupees. This included all the gold, silver, copper, jewels, and other items like porcelain, fine cloth, muslins and woollen materials. His library of 24000 books itself amounted to 6 million 463 thousand and 731 rupees.

Thus after Akbar's death his son Salim took over the reins of the kingdom. This was in 1605, when he was in the thirty-eighth year of his life. His memoir called Tuzuk-I Jahangiri gives a vivid description of the man, his innermost thoughts as well as his human failings.

After ascending the throne he chose the title Nooruddin Jahangir Padshah and explains why he did so. The name Jahangir had struck his fancy as it meant 'World seizer', and he chose the title of Nooruddin because it was synonymous with the life-giving Sun. Also he had heard in his earlier years sages had predicted that after Akbar there would be a person called Nooruddin who would rule the state. So he did his bit in fulfilling the prophecy.

This period was largely a period of peace with some small rebellions but no large-scale sweeping changes of the past, and Mughal rule was flowering. Jahangir had more interest in retaining the territory already under him and in passing his life in enjoyment than in conquering newer territory. This must have coloured Jahangir's outlook towards life since right in the beginning of the autobiography he comes across as a person who delights in everyday pleasures like eating mangoes which he calls his favourite fruit. He is at home in Hindustan and happy about it, unlike his great-grandfather Babur.

Jahangir is famous in history as the king whose ardour for justice knew no bounds. He had installed the so-called Chain of Justice at the Shah Burj at Agra fort. This was done so that if somebody did not get justice or justice was delayed then the person could come and shake it. The chain was made of pure gold and was 30 *gaz* long with 60 bells and the din it made would attract the Emperor's attention.

Jahangir also dictated that when a person died his property should be left to his heirs. This must have been already true for the common man but was not so for the *mansabdars* who held command in his vast army of people and horses; in their case all their property upon death reverted back to the Emperor. It was also decreed that in the case of the common man if there was no heir then upon his death the property would be used for building of mosques and caravanserais, or for public works.

Some of the other humane measures taken by the Emperor were to stop meting out punishments like mutilating the accused by cutting off his nose and ears.

He even forbade his officials from forcing conversion to Islam on the populace. In the matter of religion he was liberal, almost like his father, though he does express disapproval for the idol-worship of Hindus in his diary.

But Bernier goes one step further and says that he showed great interest in Christianity. Even the Jesuit priests who were invited to live in Agra by Akbar received great respect at his court. His bent of mind was such that he did not believe in superstitions or hearsay easily though he does talk of undertaking even simple activities like

entering or leaving a city at an auspicious hour (appointed after consulting astrologers) several times. In fact at the behest of his astrologers he saw his son Khusrau's daughter for the first time after she had crossed the age of three.

There was a strange custom which was becoming popular in those days. People would mutilate some of their sons into becoming eunuchs and send them to the governor of the province in lieu of revenue. Jahangir put a stop to this inhuman custom and issued proclamations to his officers to not allow such trafficking. Those who continued this custom against the imperial order were caught and imprisoned for life.

Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri was written by the Emperor himself and it minutely records his activities in the first 12 years of his life, as well as the pomp and splendour of his court. Just like his father, he was very fond of hunting and several hunting expeditions are described in detail. One such hunt lasted three months and twenty days. He records the happenings very frankly, even the embarrassing tidbits. While describing the killing of a tiger he writes "The noise of the gun made him (the tiger) very savage, and the servants who had crowded together could not stand his charge and fell over one another, so that I, through their pushing and shock, was moved a couple of paces from my place and fell down. In fact, I am sure that two or three of them placed their feet on my chest and passed over me."

The number of animals hunted was also enumerated carefully:

12 tigers, 1 deer, 44 gazelles, 1 hog deer, 2 fawns, 68 blackbucks, 31 does, 4 foxes, 8 *kurara* deer, 5 bears, 3 hyenas, 6 hares, 108 *nilgais*, 1096 fish, 1 eagle, 1 bustard, 5 peafowl, 5 herons, 5 partridges, 1 *brahmini* duck and 5 saras cranes.

The entry into his capital after the hunt was done in an ostentatious manner. He mounted an elephant close to the outskirts of the city and went towards his palace. On the way he scattered money among the crowd thronging him. The bazaars had been decorated like at Nauroz (New Year's Festival).

In his diary Jahangir also describes his battle with drinking. He started by drinking wine until it no longer intoxicated him. Then he switched to drinking arrack and with time he reached twenty cups a day of doubly distilled spirits. His health reached a point where due to his trembling hands he could not even hold a cup. Finally on the request of his physician he reduced his intake to six cups a day over a period of seven years. After some years he also started taking opium with the reduced quantity of spirits. This surfeit of drinking surely took its toll on his health, but also on his ruling abilities.

A few years after ascending the throne he had married Mehrunissa, the widow of Sher Afghan who had taken employment under Jahangir and had been given a *jagir* to administer in Bengal. When Sher Afghan died his wife had been called back and placed under Rukiya Sultana, one of Akbar's wives. At length Jahangir married her and gave her the title of Nur Mahal or the Light of the Palace; later it was changed to Nur Jahan or the Light of the World. She became his favourite wife. Her father Itmad-ud-Daulah became the *wazir* and her brother Abul Hasan became Itiqad Khan, the Master of Ceremonies. Nur Jahan gained such ascendancy over Jahangir that she managed the entire business of ruling the empire. The only part missing was that the *khutba* was not read in her name. Even coins were struck in her name and *firman*s issued in her name. Jahangir, as stated earlier, was happy with drinking wine and living a good, easy life. But it must be mentioned that Nur Jahan turned out to be an able leader, just and liberal, and earned accolades from her subjects. She is supposed to have helped marry off more than five hundred girls at her expense in her lifetime.

A description of Jahangir is given by the Englishman William Hawkins, a sea-captain, who had come to meet the Emperor on behalf of his king. Over the course of time Jahangir grew very fond of him and kept him in his close circle. Jahangir also asked him stay at his court until somebody else was sent by his king to remain in his place. Jahangir paid him a stipend of three thousand and two hundred pounds in the first year and made him *amir* of four-hundred-horse (In India the nobility and *amirs* had titles given by the number of horse they commanded). This aroused the jealousy of the Portuguese who wanted exclusive trading rights with India and did not want the English to cut into their share of profit. Hawkins thus fell out of favour with the Emperor and went back.

Hawkins has recorded his impressions of Hindustan during his stay. He says that all of Jahangir's treasure and other things of value like beasts, excepting his coins, were divided into three hundred and sixty parts and each

part was brought in his presence once in a year; thus he inspected his wealth all year round.

According to him the Emperor liked to see men executed and torn to pieces by his elephants. He enjoyed seeing combats between men and animals, like the time when he made several men fight a lion one by one. Once, the Emperor's favourite china dish was broken while loading it on a camel. When he came to know of it he flew into a rage and had the person in charge of his dishes beaten up mercilessly till he was half-dead.

Jahangir was not a popular king, states Hawkins, and his people feared him.

Jahangir's typical day is described. In the morning he prayed in a private chamber; the chamber also had the image of Christ and Mary engraved in stone. Then he showed himself to his people which was customary for kings, and then slept for two hours followed by a dinner. From noon till three in the afternoon he gave audience to the public; the nobles and others came to him with their complaints and requests, while he also enjoyed watching sports. Then he again said his prayers and had a meal and a cup of strong drink. He held a private meeting for a chosen few out of which Hawkins was one. Here he drank the remaining five cupfuls of drink and took his opium. Then he slept for two more hours and subsequently partook his supper. By this time he was not in a position to take his meal and it had to be fed to him by others; this was at around one in the night, after which he slept again.

Jahangir's diary from the thirteenth year of his reign onwards is narrated in the translation called *Wakiat-i Jahangiri* by H. M. Elliot and some of the information of the battle for accession given here is filled by A. V. Williams Jackson's 'History of India'. In Jahangir's diary in the earlier years there are numerous instances where he writes of his son Shah Jahan in affectionate terms and one can sense from his writing that Shah Jahan was his favoured son.

Jahangir's eldest son Khusrau had rebelled quite early on and had met with his father's ire. To chastise him Jahangir caused his eyelids to be stitched together so that he was temporarily blinded. When Khurram (later Shah Jahan) went to Deccan to quell the rebellion there he took his brother along and Khusrau died in mysterious circumstances. Later Shah Jahan drifted away from Nur Jahan, maybe since he did not need her help as he had the support of her brother whose daughter Mumtaz Mahal he had married. Nur Jahan now induced Jahangir to name his other son Shahriyar as successor since he was an imbecile (and had also married Nur Jahan's daughter Ladli from her previous marriage) and thus she could retain control of the empire through him. According to Jackson at this point Shah Jahan revolted.

He encroached upon some of the *jagirs* of Nur Jahan and his brother Shahriyar. The Emperor issued a *firman* to bring him to order but to no avail; Shah Jahan had decided upon marching to Agra to fight against the Emperor. Jahangir also moved his army to inflict punishment on his son, whom he now called the 'wretch'. When Shah Jahan realized that he could not take possession of Agra his army went on the retreat but was followed by the Emperor's army. Meanwhile many commanders of his army realizing that resistance was futile opened channels of talk with Jahangir's commander Mahabat Khan and crossed over to the side of the Emperor. After this Shah Jahan's army was in flight but the imperial army still did not give up the chase. This went on till the twentieth year of Jahangir's reign when Shah Jahan finally decided to give up. He wrote a letter to his father asking for forgiveness for his infractions. The King replied that he would have to send his sons Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb to the court and give up some of the territory which he had encroached, and only then would he be forgiven. In addition he would be given the country of Balaghat to govern.

Jackson asserts that this was when Nur Jahan tried to get the command of the army but Mahabat Khan, the general, did not side with her. In fact he seized the Emperor and took him away from his troops. The resourceful queen led Jahangir's troops to battle on an elephant against Mahabat Khan's force. A fierce battle ensued but Mahabat Khan won. So this remarkable queen went to her husband's camp and stayed with him in captivity. There she secretly brought over to her side many of the Emperor's commanders who had gone to Mahabat Khan's side. Mahabat Khan had to flee from there to Shah Jahan. But unfortunately this victory of Nur Jahan was short-lived since in a short while the Emperor fell sick and expired in October 1627. Now with Shah Jahan, Mahabat Khan and Nur Jahan's brother Asaf Khan united against Shahriyar he had no chance to the throne. He was defeated, imprisoned and then killed. Even though Khusrau's son Dawar Baksh was then put on

the throne, it was only a brief while before Shah Jahan ascended the throne and Dawar Baksh was no longer heard of. Nur Jahan then went out of public life and lived the rest of her years in retirement. Upon her death she was buried with her husband in Lahore.

It was high time I made a trip to this second capital of Hindustan. The trip took place towards the end of the monsoon season.

On reaching Agra I directly made my way to the most visited of monuments, the Taj Mahal. There was a heavy rush of people waiting in queue to see it, and I went and stood at the end of the queue, waiting patiently to enter the premises.

After a long wait I entered inside and came to the forecourt where stood the majestic main *darwaza* opening to the garden which led to the Taj. This main *darwaza*, itself a monument, gave a hint of what lay ahead. The two-storeyed recessed arch of the *darwaza* further had arches inside it and on the sides. The *darwaza* was mainly made of red stone with a dressing of marble around the arches. It was topped by *chhatris* on the four corners and a flurry of smaller *chhatris* standing side-by-side and between the larger *chhatris*, a design Shah Jahan would use in later monuments.

On entering the *darwaza* I got my first glimpse of the Taj Mahal.

At this point I felt that the long wait was worth the trouble as my first view of the Taj left me awestruck; I was beholding a monument just descended from the sky above. The pearly white marble used for construction reflected the sunlight all around on the unusually sunny day, making it seem as if the Taj was shining in its own light.

Built as a mausoleum by Shah Jahan for his beloved queen Mumtaz Mahal who died in 1631, it is probably the grandest tomb in the world, rightly considered as the high point of Mughal architecture. After his death in 1666 Shah Jahan was also laid to rest here.

Separating me from the Taj was a huge garden divided into smaller quarters according to the *char-bagh* layout. There were channels of water bisecting the smaller quarters, while the water channel running straight towards the Taj had an array of fountains.

The Taj Mahal stood on a high, solid, marble base. As I walked towards it I thought that the edifice was perfect in proportion and this fact along with the humongous, gracefully curved dome above and the four minarets standing guard like sentries seemed to me the real secret of its beauty. The minarets complimented the Taj beautifully, but at the same time seemed to have a life of their own. The Taj would not be half as eloquent without them.

The symmetry of the Taj meant that it offered the same view when seen from any direction. The façade consisted of the typical double-storey recessed arch with two levels of arches on the sides, complete with beautiful *parchinkari* floral patterns inlaid with coloured stone. Around the central arch there was a band of elegant calligraphy which added to the sumptuousness of the design. Inside the arches there was a profusion of *jaalis*, while elsewhere there were rich, flower patterns carved in relief in the white marble.

Just like in the Humayun tomb, in the midst of a network of chambers, there was an octagonal innermost chamber, almost a sanctum, which housed the relatively simple cenotaphs of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz.

To add to its glory the gleaming water of the river Jumna flowing behind made for an ideal location for the Taj. I could imagine the Emperor, on a moonlit night, floating down the Jumna on his barge admiring his creation. Of course building such a singular edifice did not happen free of controversy. Constructing the Taj Mahal is said to have strained the Emperor's treasury, and was not taken cheerfully by Aurangzeb who is supposed to have seen it as the squandering of the kingdom's wealth. Legend also has it that Shah Jahan had the fingers of the artisans chopped off so that they could not create another such masterpiece.

Bernier is also full of praise for the Taj which he visited a few years after its construction. He says about it "The edifice has a magnificent appearance, and is conceived and executed effectually. Nothing offends the eye; on the contrary, it is delighted with every part, and never tired with looking... The interior or concave part of the dome and generally the whole of the wall from top to bottom are faced with white marble; no part can be found that is not skillfully wrought or that has not its peculiar beauty... I decidedly think that this monument deserves much more to be numbered among the wonders of the world than the pyramids of Egypt."



He also says that in those days the Quran was continually read in Mumtaz's memory by *mullahs* who were kept for that purpose.

On my second trip to Agra I went to have a look at Akbar's tomb situated at Sikandra. The construction of the tomb was started by Akbar himself in 1602, but he died before it could be completed. Work on the tomb was finished during Jahangir's reign. In Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri he mentions that the total cost of the edifice was 1,500,000 rupees.

When he saw the newly made tomb it did not meet his expectations since he wanted his beloved father's tomb to be such that wayfarers would exclaim that the like of such a building was not to be found elsewhere. But I found the tomb very interesting.

The South Gate through which I entered had a recessed arch, with the sides of the arch decorated with beautiful mosaic patterns. These mosaics set it apart from any other Mughal monument I had seen. The patterns repeatedly formed the six-pointed Star of David at some places, and at still others was depicted the eight-sided star or the Rub-el-Hizb associated with Islam, and sometimes with Hinduism, maybe signifying the eclectic view-point of the Emperor.

On top of the Gate there were four white marble *minars* rising from the corners of the roof, and looked like the precursors of those found at Taj Mahal. In front of the South Gate was a simple, low, red-sandstone entrance arch known as the Salaami Gate. In the olden days one would have to bow while passing through this low arch. After passing through the Salaami Gate I came to a long and wide walkway which led to the main tomb building at the centre of the premises. On both sides of the walkway there were many acres of garden, probably larger than any I had seen in Delhi, where deer roamed around gaily. The entrance to the tomb building was another *iwan* or recessed arch with mosaic patterns, identical to the South Gate.

Inside, there was the antechamber whose walls and roof were richly decorated with gorgeous inlaid patterns. There were golden grape patterns on a royal blue and red background; there were tree patterns, and then there were flower motifs as well as the typical geometrical patterns. Binding it all together was a band of Islamic calligraphy on the walls all around. The doorway was a huge, patterned *jaali* providing the much-needed ventilation. The tomb had suffered damage earlier on, and had been repaired during British times, at the start of the twentieth century.

The antechamber opened into a tunnel which went all the way to the central chamber housing Akbar's cenotaph. This whitewashed, domed chamber was rather simple and contained solely the white-marble cenotaph of the Emperor. The huge dome overhead meant it was an echo chamber, which was proved when the attendant helpfully chanted "Allahu-Akbar". His echo lingered on for several seconds.

Akbar's tombstone was in axis with the South Gate, and the Salaami Gate further out. The layout was planned in this way so that when somebody passed through the Salaami Gate and inevitably bowed, he was in effect bowing down to the late Emperor.

The building housing the cenotaph consisted of five storeys with each succeeding storey being smaller than the lower one. The lower storeys were predominantly made of red stone and the uppermost storey, supposed to have been made by Jahangir, was entirely of white marble. All the storeys barring the lowest one were in the form of many-pillared halls, interspersed with a great number of *chhatris*.

Another notable feature of this tomb was that there was no dome visible externally which was a departure from the norm at the time, but then this great King was not known to follow precedents.

From Sikandra I proceeded to Fatehpur-Sikri which was thirty-five kilometers away and very close to the Rajasthan border. This was the new town which was settled by Akbar and then abandoned due to the paucity of potable water. Today there are two main landmarks that tourists visit. These are the Jama Masjid and the Emperor's palace.

First I went to the Jama Masjid. This Jama Masjid was a majestic mosque built on an elevation, approached by a long flight of stairs. Its main entrance was the lofty and awe-inspiring Buland Darwaza, one of the tallest gateways anywhere.

On entering the Buland Darwaza I saw a huge courtyard full of tourists. The prime reason attracting the crowds

thronging there was that in the middle of the courtyard lay the *dargah* of Salim Chishti, the same saint who had granted Akbar the heir to his throne. I heard another version of this story at Fatehpur, the version popular among the locals. This adaptation states that Akbar had visited Salim Chishti six times before but the saint had turned him back empty-handed. When the Emperor came to him the seventh time and importuned for help with divine intercession for an heir the saint's six-month old infant son spoke and asked his father to help the Emperor. That is when the saint relented and told the Emperor that he would have an heir. Interestingly the saint's own son is said to have died soon after.

The domed tomb of the saint was entirely made of white marble with a *jaali* enclosure in which lay the *mazaar*. It is popularly believed that tying a thread in the *jaalis* and asking for a favour would get it fulfilled. A famous Indian actress has been known to have come here five times in five months to get her request granted.

On the western side of the mosque there was a high, domed prayer chamber inside which were richly decorated, colourful mosaics covering the larger part of the internal walls as well as the *mihirabs*.

The entire periphery of the mosque was surmounted by a line of *chhatris* upon *chhatris*, almost touching each other. During Mughal times these *chhatris* would have been illuminated with candlelight at night. Another prominent feature of the mosque was the stone *chhajjas*, protruding out a long way, which looked to have been built for utility rather than ornamentation. In a nook there was a staircase leading down to an underground tunnel, running on for miles, which must have been used to escape from enemies during an attack. Today parts of the tunnel have caved in and so it is barred for visitors. Legend has it that Anarkali, the court dancer prince Salim fell in love with, was secretly removed to Lahore using this tunnel.

On the other side of the Jama Masjid was the Emperor's palace. Built almost entirely of red sandstone the palace was sheer opulence itself.

The most conspicuous element was the vast courtyard, on one side of which was the famous Anoop Talao. This was a beautiful, small tank of water with a central platform, which was almost like a small island. The platform was reached from all four sides by narrow, elevated walkways. Looking at Anoop Talao one could imagine the Emperor wiling away his leisure hours there with his women or discussing matters of statecraft or having long-winded religious discussions with his courtiers.

A little distance away was a square building, most likely the Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Private Audience). It was a single chamber but following the example of many Lodi-era monuments, it had the external look of a double storeyed building, complete with a balustraded balcony on the second storey. On the inside there was a central pillar with a profusion of majestic brackets forming the much-admired capital, while on the sides of the chamber there were again balustraded walkways and these extended to the top of the central pillar. It has also been conjectured that the building was not Diwan-i-Khas but the hall meant for the weighing ceremony of the Emperor. Jahangir talks of this ceremony in his memoir where he writes "The late king Akbar, who was the place of manifestation of kindness and grace also approved of the custom, and twice in every year he weighed himself against several sorts of metals, gold, silver, and many precious articles, once according to the solar year and once according to the lunar year, and divided their total value, which was worth about a lakh of rupees, among *faqirs* and needy people."

Later I strolled towards the nearby Panch Mahal, which, as the name suggests, was a five storeyed structure, each storey designed as a hall of many pillars. There were 84 pillars on the ground floor, and the number decreased while moving up, so that there were just 4 pillars on the top floor, giving the building a tapered look, almost like the sail of a ship.

The look of the entire palace was pre-dominantly Hindu, with the use of Indian elements such as ornate brackets supporting a *chhajja*, carved pillars and the red sandstone balustrades, low in height with beautiful *jaali* patterns, giving them a very delicate look.

It was also interesting to see that in the palace there was space provided on one side to accommodate the maids who serviced the ladies of the harem; this was a large dormitory-style block which must have been partitioned with curtains, for privacy.

## Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb

Shah Jahan became the emperor in the beginning of the year 1628. He is known to be a person in love with grandeur in every aspect of life. This is shown by the magnificent edifices and objects that he had built during his reign, the likes of some of which might not be made again; the Peacock Throne, the Taj Mahal and the Jama Masjid of Delhi easily come to mind.

The Badshahnama of Abdul Hamid Lahori mentions in some detail the construction of the fabled Peacock Throne during his rule.

Shah Jahan was of the opinion that the jewels and precious stones gathered by the royalty should be put to good use, that of being studded in the royal throne. This would bless the public with a view of the royal splendour, while exalting His Majesty further at the same time. Jewels, diamonds and precious stones and pearls worth 86 lakhs of rupees were selected by the Emperor and handed over to Bebadal Khan, the superintendent of the gold-smithy. In addition 1 lakh *tolas* of gold worth 14 lakhs of rupees was to be used in its making. The throne is described as:

“The throne was to be 3 *gaz* (1 *gaz* is approximately 33 inches) in length, two and a half *gaz* in breadth and five *gaz* in height. The outside of the canopy was to be of enamel work with occasional gems, and the inside was to be thickly set with rubies, garnets, and other jewels, and it was to be supported by twelve emerald columns. On the top of each pillar there were to be two peacocks thick set with gems, and between each set of peacocks was to be a tree set with rubies and diamonds, emeralds and pearls. The ascent was to consist of three steps set with jewels of fine water ... Of the eleven jeweled recesses formed around it for cushions the middle one, intended for the seat of the Emperor, cost ten lakhs of rupees”.

The throne took seven years in the making and cost the exchequer 100 lakhs of rupees in those days. Such was the wealth of the Mughals of India.

However, being a lover of art and beauty did not make Shah Jahan a softer person. The streak of the *ghazi* ran strong in him, as in some of his earlier ancestors. He was apprised that many temples of the infidels had been begun in the previous reign and were as yet incomplete in Benares, the holy city of the infidels. His Majesty, as the prime defender of his faith, gave the order to destroy all such incomplete temples of the infidels everywhere.

I have found that reading most of the royal biographies is a rather boring exercise. The accounts are dull, and biased towards the royals, as though the writer is trying to ingratiate himself with his patron. Also, the narrative is generally about the endless battles fought by these braves, and the niceties observed after the battle. They rarely talk of the everyday life of the royals, lesser still, of the common people of the day. This sometimes makes oriental history a very dry subject. The accounts given by foreigners like the Frenchman Bernier are more interesting. When the Frenchman went back from Aurangzeb's court to his native land and published his memoirs he was not compelled to fawn over any Mughal *amir*, or to gloss over an uncomfortable detail. Thus his book is a candid portrayal of the events he observed during the last days of Shah Jahan's reign, and thereafter.

Bernier describes the situation in Shah Jahan's court and the various factions that existed to succeed or even usurp the throne. The eldest son was Dara Shikoh, who was generally known to be a gentleman. He had agreeable manners and was witty, and had very liberal religious views. He could converse with Hindus as a Hindu, and with Christians as a brother Christian. But he probably did so from political expediency. His fault was excessive vanity regarding his intellect and the consequent shunning of those who ventured to give him counsel, the result being that his well-wishers found it difficult to tell him of the intrigues of his brothers. Aurangzeb, whose name meant 'Ornament of the Throne', on the other hand, was a lesser prepossessing personality, nor was he as urbane as his brother Dara. But he chose his allies well, and ensured that they remained faithful to him. He was a taciturn person who never showed his real feelings towards his father, nor his intentions and machinations regarding the throne. He portrayed himself as a person more interested in becoming a dervish than in fulfilling his royal duties. The entire court was quite convinced by his show of piety,

excepting Dara, who right from the beginning had apprehensions about this brother whom he snidely referred as the 'Namaazi' or the (Falsely) Pious One.

The Indian mind thinks of Dara Shikoh as an all-good person and Aurangzeb as all-bad, and there is always the question as to how better would the Mughal empire have fared, and consequently the whole of India, if Dara Shikoh had prevailed in the battle for succession. But Bernier gives a slightly different picture of both the brothers.

Sultan Shuja, the second son, was in the same mould as Dara; he was more discreet as well as polite than Dara. But he was a slave to his harem and spent considerable time there. But strategically he chose to become a Shia so as to get the Persians in the court to join his faction.

The fourth son, Murad Baksh, was not talented like his other brothers and was always looking to disport himself with playful pastimes.

Among Shah Jahan's two daughters, Jahan Ara was the elder one, and her father's favourite. She was very good looking and amiable, and generally liked by all. She superintended everything around the Emperor's life, the food that he ate, as well as some matters regarding the imperial court. She attached herself to Dara's faction, and it is believed that in return he promised to allow her to marry (marriage of Mughal princesses was not encouraged outside of the royal dynasty since such a marriage would give an outsider the power and reason to ascend to the throne).

The second daughter Roshan Ara was less beautiful, and not so favoured, but was also a great seeker of pleasure. She sided with Aurangzeb and later proved instrumental in his becoming emperor.

Bernier makes an interesting observation at this point. Due to fractious relationships between his sons Shah Jahan had great concern for his personal safety, and was always worried about having his kingdom snatched away by one of them, or broken into smaller independent kingdoms. To avert this eventuality he apportioned parts of his realm to them to govern in his name. Bengal was given to Sultan Shuja, Gujarat to Murad Baksh, Deccan to Aurangzeb and Kabul and Multan to Dara. The other princes left for their destinations, but Dara continued to remain at court and Shah Jahan encouraged him in this. He was given a lower throne to occupy in court, but both of them seemed to have the same power. At the same time he carried correspondence with Aurangzeb, especially on governance matters.

At this state of affairs Shah Jahan fell very ill, and since he was an old man who had spent his life as most kings did, seeking pleasure and indulging his senses, it was generally believed that he would not survive and there was fear and trepidation felt all around regarding his expected death, and the consequences to follow. And rightly so, since this illness started the battle for accession to the throne. All the four brothers started collecting troops and building their armies. The first move was made by Sultan Shuja who issued a proclamation that Dara had poisoned the Emperor, and that Shuja would punish Dara and himself become emperor. Though Dara and Shah Jahan sent him (and also to Aurangzeb) missives saying that all was becoming well with the Emperor, this did not stop the armies of the brothers from marching to Agra. Aurangzeb knew he did not have the largest army and he also had not amassed as much wealth as Shuja had from his Bengali province, so he would have to rely on stratagem. He started communication with his brother Murad Baksh saying that Dara and Shuja were not capable of the crown and Aurangzeb's brotherly affection for Murad Baksh made him decide that he would join forces with him and place him on the throne, Aurangzeb himself being content with living the life of a *fakir*, and desirous of passing his life in seclusion and prayer. So both the brothers combined their armies and started for Agra, while the Emperor Shah Jahan, distraught at this turn of events, kept sending them letters exhorting them to go back as he was already convalescing. But the princes kept up appearance that they were concerned about his health and would meet him and offer their tributes while at the same time rescuing him from Dara's clutches.

Meanwhile Sultan Shuja was coming nearer and Shah Jahan sent Dara's son Suleiman Shikoh and Raja Jaisingh to subdue him. They had a skirmish in which Sultan Shuja's army was forced to concede defeat and run from the battlefield.

Aurangzeb's army reached near Allahabad and Shah Jahan was forced to send a part of his army under Kasim Khan and Raja Jaswant Singh to fight him. But this army was routed and forced to flee. Jaswant Singh decided to go back to his own kingdom than to face the Emperor after defeat, only to have the gate of his fort shut at

his face. This was done at the command of his wife, who being a Rajput, considered it against her family's honour for her husband to return home after defeat. She would have preferred it if he had been slain in the battlefield. At this point Bernier mentions an observation of his, which has long been folklore in India. He says that the Rajput men were accustomed to using opium since very early in life and this drug gave them the absence of fear for which they were celebrated. Before they started for a fight they consumed an even larger amount of opium and galloped headlong into the face of danger, and were thus an essential part of the Mughal fighting machine.

Now the big battle was fought between Dara's army on one side and Aurangzeb and Murad's armies on the other side near the Jumna river, a bit off from Agra. On the day of the battle Dara was seated on a big Ceylon elephant, and led his army well. As the battle raged on his army got the higher hand, while Aurangzeb, also perched on his elephant exhorted his troops to fight on. At this juncture Dara made the tactical mistake of dismounting from his elephant and getting on to a horse. From this point on a rumour spread within his troops that Dara was killed and his army, on sensing that of their leader was not on his royal elephant, went into disarray. Sensing that now it was Aurangzeb or Murad Baksh who would become king they all tried to run away from the battlefield to escape the enemy's wrath. Thus within the next few minutes Aurangzeb's army had recovered and defeated Dara's soldiers.

Dara quickly returned to Agra, where under his father's orders he tried to rally back, and also wait for his son Suleiman Shikoh to bring in his portion of the army to his father's aid. Aurangzeb then sent messages to Raja Jaisingh and Delil Khan, who were in Suleiman's army, to convince them to change sides and enter his faction, and also capture Suleiman Shikoh. Raja Jaisingh took the message to the prince and successfully impressed upon him the futility of trying to fight Aurangzeb, and advised him to flee to the mountains, and seek refuge with the Raja of Srinagar. From this time onwards Dara was fighting a losing battle.

Meanwhile Aurangzeb contrived to get possession of the fort at Agra where his ailing father lay. At length Aurangzeb's son Sultan Mahmud took over the fort by a coup-de-grace and Shah Jahan was put under house-arrest in his own fort.

Aurangzeb's next move was to get his brother and ally Murad Baksh arrested after getting him drunk, and his troops and subordinates, those who were not already on Aurangzeb's payroll, were bribed to acquiesce. Murad was quietly transferred to the jail in Salimgarh fort of Delhi and then later to Gwalior fort for good. This left the way open for Aurangzeb to become king.

Aurangzeb now started the manhunt for Dara. Dara went to Lahore, then turned towards Multan but realized that even this option was lost to him and started going towards Ahmedabad where he gained entry into the fort.

At the same time Shah Shuja having recovered from his earlier failure was mounting a second attempt to become the emperor. A pitched battle was fought between his army and Aurangzeb's. In this battle also fate was on Aurangzeb's side. The tide was turning in Shuja's favour when, in a sense of *déjà-vu* for the reader, Shuja made the same mistake made by Dara. He left the howdah of his elephant to mount a faster steed so that he could better pursue his adversaries. Seeing that their prince was missing from his elephant's back, his troops lost heart and there was general confusion. Aurangzeb's army would not miss such a godsend and was victorious on the day, while Shuja's army retreated hastily, and later left for Bengal.

Next Aurangzeb decided to finish Dara's power decisively by battling him in Gujarat. Raja Jaswant Singh offered an alliance to Dara to fight Aurangzeb, which Dara accepted, only to be left high-and-dry by the Raja at the final moment. At this point his army was already out in Ajmer, a good many days' march from Ahmedabad and could not retreat. This battle was also decided quickly in the favour of Aurangzeb's forces and Dara had to flee. But his flight to the northern mountains was destined to end in misery. He took refuge with a chieftain whose life he had saved earlier, but the chieftain, overcome maybe by cupidity, bound up Dara and his young son Sipihr Shikoh and took them to Delhi to Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb had them both paraded around Delhi on an elephant to impress upon the people that the battle of succession had been decided, and so to dissuade any rebellion among Dara's followers or well-wishers. Some days later, Dara was murdered in prison under the pretext of his being a *kafir* and his head was severed, thus putting a tragic end to the life of the man who almost became the emperor of Hindustan.

His son, Suleiman Shikoh, on the other hand, was induced to flee Srinagar and was caught when on the run, and brought to Delhi to be jailed in Salimgarh fort, and later sent to Gwalior.

Aurangzeb's imprisoned brother Murad Baksh was ultimately beheaded under a weak pretext, and the last remaining adversary, Sultan Shuja of Bengal, had to face a constant onslaught from Aurangzeb's army and was forced to leave the confines of India and escape to Burma.

In May of 1659, after defeating Shuja at Khajwah and Dara at Ajmer the Emperor's procession entered into Delhi with great pomp and splendour. In his book 'History of Aurangzeb based on original sources' Jadunath Sarkar describes that at the head of the procession were the people of the band, followed by caparisoned elephants, then the cavalry with pure-bred steeds, female elephants and dromedary camels. Columns of infantry came next, to be followed by the cream of the procession. This was Emperor of Hindustan Aurangzeb Alamgir, seated on his throne, atop the most splendid elephant of all. The procession finally entered the Red fort through the Lahore Gate, and gave audience in the Diwan-i-Am and the Diwan-i-Khas, and then went to the seraglio.

The second and befittingly majestic coronation of Aurangzeb took place in the month of June of 1659, a year after his first coronation in July 1658, but his reign was ordered to be considered as started from May of 1658. The festivities lasted for a good two months, from July till August. The coronation of the Mughals meant the act in which the monarch sat on the throne with great ceremony, with all of his various courtiers and *umara* (plural of *amir*) present to pay obeisance. It was essential for the *khutba* to be read in the name of the king to complete his ascent to the throne, and in case of an old dynasty like the Mughal dynasty, also coins had to be minted in his name. Jadunath Sarkar describes the various actions of the Mughal on formally becoming emperor and also the festivities that followed among his subjects. On coronation day the entire fort was decorated like a bride; the whole of the Diwan-i-Am was covered with exquisite drapes and brocades, no expense being spared. At the centre of this Diwan was placed the Peacock Throne, replete with its diamonds, rubies and topazes, with a canopy supported by columns studded with gems. The courtyard in front of the Diwan was similarly decorated, covered with velvet held up by silver poles, and the ground was covered with rich carpets.

At the auspicious hour appointed by the astrologers the Emperor sat on his throne, and immediately the festivities began with great singing and dancing.

Coins were struck in his name without the *kalima*, since the coins would also be handled by the Hindus and he did not want the sacred verse to be besmirched with the touch of non-Muslims. So his coins bore the words "This coin has been stamped on earth like the shining full moon, by King Aurangzeb, the Conqueror of the World". One of his first edicts was to abolish the existing Persian calendar which the Mughals started following under Akbar. He adopted the Islamic calendar which followed the lunar cycle. The courtiers and mathematicians tried to reason with him that the Islamic calendar shifted year after year, and following it would create difficulties in administration and collection of farm revenues. Aurangzeb was well aware of this but his fanaticism overcame his pragmatic self and he refused to follow the calendar of the Persians, and so went ahead with this *firman*.

On the following days he was loaded with the customary gifts by his *amirs*, and in return gave them robes of honour, and other presents as he deemed they deserved. The celebrations continued even in the night, and the river Jumna was lit on both sides; there were numerous boats with lamps arranged on planks which rowed up and down the river, providing the general population with a grand spectacle. To top it all was the display of fireworks by the artillery department by the river outside Diwan-i-Khas, watched even by the Emperor.

Aurangzeb is described as having a thin but tall figure, as a result of his exertions on long campaigns which he had to undertake as a prince. His face was long with two cold, piercing eyes. With age his nose and chin acquired sharpness while his cheeks got a hollow look.

Bernier also gives some idea through certain events of the kind of person Aurangzeb was. One of the *amirs*, in his efforts to please the Emperor, requested him not exert himself so much on his duties so as to fall sick or diminish his mental faculties. Aurangzeb, in reply, admonished him by saying that a king was the custodian of

his people and must only live for their happiness, and if need be, must willingly wield the sword to die for them. He would never search for a life of sensuousness and luxury, abandoning his kingdom in the care of a *wazir*.

The second incident relates to a former teacher of his, who on hearing of his pupil's elevation, came to Delhi in order to gain some reward to the expectedly thankful king. Aurangzeb initially ignored him, but then finally confronted him and asked why the sycophant cherished the hope of favour from him. He had wrongly taught him that Hindustan was the only important kingdom in the world and the other kingdoms were mere principalities compared to it; instead he should have imparted him proper knowledge of their history, mode of living and religion. The teacher should have taught him the tenets of statecraft and what makes or breaks nations, and the errors to be avoided by a ruler. But he wasted his royal pupil's time by teaching him Arabic which had no value for him in his everyday life. Saying this he banished the former teacher unceremoniously.

Now, after imprisoning his father in the Agra fort and becoming emperor he ardently wanted forgiveness and the resumption of fatherly affection from Shah Jahan. He made life in Agra fort as pleasing as he could for Shah Jahan. He was treated with respect, as due to a king, and all his requests were complied with. He had access to his former enjoyments like watching the *nautch* of the dance-girls, and animal fights. In degrees, Shah Jahan forgave his son for his transgression and resumed an active correspondence with him.

As it was the law of the land that the *amirs* held property only for the duration of their lifetimes and upon death the property reverted to the King, it caused much consternation and hardship to the surviving family. Shah Jahan desired his son to continue with such a policy so as to keep the state coffers filled. The offended son replied back by asserting that it was an unjust practice, though undoubtedly benefitting the crown. But such a policy would embitter the people and his dominions may rebel against him. He would rather take his chances by ruling his subjects in a just manner.

These incidents changed the way I viewed this much despised king of yore. But if one sees from Aurangzeb's point of view his brutality and ruthless determination to gain the throne was probably an act of self-preservation; if Dara had been victorious he might have meted out the same treatment to Aurangzeb as he himself got.

So why did Aurangzeb get such a notorious reputation in history? In his book 'Aurangzeb and the decay of the Mughal Empire' Stanley Law-Poole tries to give a better character sketch of Aurangzeb. He says that in the half-century of his rule there is no concrete instance providing proof of his cruelty. He was certainly a puritan and one of the strictest followers of his religion, following a strain which could only be defined as fundamentalist; he was always on the look-out for converting his subjects to Islam, either through inducements of gifts, or through enticement of forgiveness, even for major crimes like murder. Even as a king he lived the life of a *fakir* as he had been professing since his youth. He stopped eating flesh, and never touched the spirits which had so enfeebled the minds of so many of his clansmen. As a good Muslim he practiced the austerities and fasts prescribed and spent considerable time in the mosque, or reading the holy books.

When giving audience to his people to dispense justice he kept up a pleasing and mild demeanour, and never chided the improper conduct of the petitioners, believing that this would build in him the traits of tolerance and patience. Also, he never issued a death penalty in a fit of anger.

An instance which shows his generosity happened when a drought after his accession to the throne caused a famine in his kingdom. He immediately provided food at the cost of the exchequer to the affected populace, and many taxes and cesses were remitted during that time. He also abolished other taxes like those on Hindu-Muslim fairs and licenses on liquor and gambling dens, probably due to religious reasons. Of course, as happens in Hindustan, many of these taxes were still collected by the officials, without his knowledge, or some say, the Emperor conveniently turned a blind eye, or mildly chastised the culprits, the intention being to keep him popular while also collecting the taxes required to replenish the treasury box.

But he was also of a highly suspicious nature, always expecting that the same treatment would become his lot, as he had handed out to his father. He did not take his food or medicine without ever getting it tasted first. He never trusted his officials entirely and so did not concentrate much power in their hands, and kept them

moving about so that they never became too familiar with their surroundings. The authority given to these officials was kept under check in the manner disclosed by a contemporary historian Dr Fryer:

“To create as many *amirs* or nobles out of the Mughals and Persians as may be fairly entrusted, but always with this policy – To remove them to remote charges from that where their *jagir* or annuity arises; as not thinking it fit to trust them with forces or money in their allotted principalities, lest they should be tempted to unyoke themselves, and slip their neck from the servitude imposed upon themselves; for which purpose their wives and children are left as pledges at court;...”

He guarded his position as monarch with the zeal of a hawk. When his eldest son had defected to Shuja's side and then in a few months returned back to his father, he was imprisoned for life, and the second one was strictly warned not to follow in his older brother's footsteps. But later even this son was imprisoned for six years on mere suspicion of his intentions.

Despite being a just, devoted king to his people, he could not form a bond with them whereby they could look upon him as a father figure. His frugality and self-denial and simple demeanour and strict devotion to his religion were strange to a people who had become used to the comparatively laid-back rules of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

In accordance with the laws of his religion he would not tolerate music and dance, and issued a *firman* to that effect. The police were ordered to confiscate the musical instruments of the musicians and burn them. An interesting anecdote narrates that Aurangzeb saw many singers following a coffin being taken for burial. On enquiry he was told that it was the funeral procession of Music, which had died at his hands. Aurangzeb replied “I approve of their piety, but let her be buried deep so that she is never heard again”. Thereafter, for as long as Aurangzeb reigned, there was no music or *nautch* at court, though it still continued in the palaces of his *amirs*.

The first decade of his rule passed peacefully with no great disturbance in his kingdom, the King having consolidated his position, and a general tranquility was all over the place. In 1668 Raja Jai Singh, who had been an indefatigable loyalist of the Mughals, died. In April of 1669 he was apprised of the Brahmins of Varanasi and other Hindu cities who were swaying the faithful Muslims by teaching them their ‘wicked sciences’. The Emperor promptly decreed that the schools and temples of the idolators be razed. Of course, this command was not carried out, and just a few examples were made, so that the idolators would not proselytize the Faithful. A few years later the odious *jizya* or poll-tax was revived by the Emperor, to be levied on all non-Muslims. This led to great vexation among the majority of the populace, which was Hindu. There were demonstrations and protests at Delhi, but they all went in vain. Even when the protestors lay down in front of the *Badshah's* elephant he would just keep moving over their bodies.

In 1678, another influential person Raja Jaswant Singh died. This was another wrong move on the part of the Emperor when he tried to send the Raja's two sons to Delhi to be educated and converted to his religion. This was anathema to the Rajput mind and ignited the first main rebellion against Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb's son Akbar who was commanding the main body of his army defected to the Rajput side, and proclaimed himself as the new emperor. But Aurangzeb, the king of artifice, sent a letter to his son congratulating him on having gained the confidence of the gullible Rajput *rajas*. The letter was meant to be intercepted by the *rajas*, who then lost faith in prince Akbar and the Mughal soldiers under Akbar returned back to Aurangzeb; but Akbar did not return back from fear of his unforgiving parent and fled to the Deccan and later to Persia. The revolt was squelched but he had lost the vital friendship of the Rajputs, the people who were instrumental in keeping the Mughal flag aloft in Hindustan.

The next mistake that Aurangzeb made was of trying to expand his power down south in the Deccan. He left Delhi in 1681 and arrived in Burhanpur, never to see his capital again in his life. He spent the next twenty-six years in trying to subdue the southern kingdoms but to no great success. His first move was to try and vanquish the Marathas, who, famous for their guerilla tactics, never met the enemy in a pitched battle, but always attacked them in the ghats and hills of which they were masters. For the Mughals fighting the Marathas was like fighting with wraiths, and for the Marathas fighting the Mughals was a fight for *swaraj* from aliens. Besides, the Marathas had allies in the common folk of the area, and so the Mughals were not able to exterminate their power. Aurangzeb's tactical error of strictly collecting the *jizya*, and edicts like no Hindu



being allowed to travel in a *palki* or Arab horse made him more unpopular than he was already. The Emperor's son Muazzam defeated Golconda in 1685 and accepted an offer of peace in return for indemnity, and in the subsequent year the Emperor won Bijapur. In 1687 the Emperor besieged the King of Golconda and captured him, putting an end to the rule of his dynasty. But he still remained in the south, with the ambition of becoming the lord of the entire peninsula. However he could never tame the fiercely independent Marathas who with their daring tactics troubled his army all the time. Meanwhile Aurangzeb's long absence in the north was also emboldening the other rulers; the Rajputs had already been casting off the imperial yoke, while the Jats were revolting around Agra. The Sikhs were also proving to be a new menace in the north. Finally, in the year 1707, a mortally tired Emperor, after having fought all the battles of his life, died in the Deccan. As in life, so in death, his grave was a simple monument in Khuldabad, near Aurangabad.

## Chandni Chowk

The most famous landmark of Delhi, Chandni Chowk can definitely arouse mixed emotions in the visitor. The area is chock-a-block with famous monuments of which one has heard since childhood and is a tourist's delight, but the crowds can be overwhelming. Walking on the road can be a slow and bumpy task, one that can test the patience. This is the centre of the city of Shahjahanabad settled by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in the 1640s, the city which was the jewel of the empire in its heyday, the city which saw the killing of Guru Tegh Bahadur giving rise to the martial clan of the Sikhs called the Khalsa, the city which saw devastation in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and then bore the wounds of Partition almost a hundred years later. The Chandni Chowk road extends from the Red fort to the Fatehpuri mosque, with the Sis Ganj Gurudwara right in the middle. Close to the Red fort and at a right angle to the Chandni Chowk Street is the road leading to the Jama Masjid via the Cotton Market. At the other end of the Chandni Chowk Street and straight on, but just a bit to the right is the Khari Baoli spice market; in the perpendicular direction lies the Church Mission Road.

The Gurudwara Sisganj Sahib is the spot where in the year 1675 the 9<sup>th</sup> guru of the Sikhs Guru Tegh Bahadur was kept imprisoned along with his followers Bhai Sati Dass, Bhai Mati Dass and Bhai Dyal Dass, and subsequently killed.

The story is narrated locally among the Sikhs as follows:

Some Hindu Pandits from Kashmir sought audience with Guru Tegh Bahadur and told him of their plight of forced proselytization under the Mughal rule. Moved by their importunate requests the Guru asked them to tell the rulers that they would convert to Islam if the rulers were able to convince the Guru to accept conversion to Islam. Thereafter Aurangzeb summoned the Guru to Delhi, a request with which the Guru complied (But Khushwant Singh, in his scholarly work, 'A history of the Sikhs' does not mention any direct meeting between the Emperor and the Guru. In fact he maintains that the Emperor was not in Delhi when the Guru was executed). Along with some companions the Guru left for Delhi. In Delhi he is said to have had religious debates with the Emperor, with the result that the Emperor failed to convince the Guru to convert to Islam.

Aurangzeb then tried to pressure the Guru through fear, by having his companions executed. Finally the Guru himself was threatened with death penalty, and asked to prove through a miracle that he was a holy man, advanced on the path to God. An anecdote associated with this narration is that the Guru agreed to show the required miracle. He tied a charmed piece of paper around his neck and claimed that the executioner's swift hack would not be able to sever his neck from the body. However when the executioner did strike his blow the neck rolled off the body, to everybody's surprise. When the piece of paper was read, it said '*Sis diya par sir na diya*' (Gave the head, but did not give away the secret). The Guru's severed head and body were smuggled out, the body being hidden in cotton by an acolyte and taken to Rikab Ganj village and cremated there. The head was carried to his son staying at Kiratpur around 300 km. away and cremated with honours.

This martyrdom by the Guru to help the repressed populace was a watershed moment in the history of Sikhism, just as the death of Guru Arjan had been 69 years earlier. It led to the creation of the martial force of the Khalsa by his son, the 10<sup>th</sup> guru, Gobind Singh.

After Aurangzeb's death, as the Mughal Empire lost its strength, the Khalsa along with the Marathas gained in power. In 1783 when the Sikhs camped outside Delhi this gurudwara was established by General Baghel Singh at the location of the lock-up where Guru Tegh Bahadur was imprisoned (He built other gurudwaras too, such as Bangla Shaib, Rakabganj and Bala Sahib). In front of the gurudwara is a museum dedicated to the companions of the Guru for their sacrifice and there is also a fountain, supposedly at the spot where they were killed.

I entered the gurudwara premises and took off my shoes and gave them at a counter for safekeeping. People of all religions are allowed entry. But one cannot enter a gurudwara with footwear and also going inside without covering the head is not allowed. There was the *langar* (strictly speaking, community kitchen, where all are invited to partake of food) going on in the next room but my tummy was full so I regretfully skipped it. I noticed that most of the people serving the *langar* or even those who were at the shoe counter were

volunteers who considered it a sacred duty to do service or *kar seva* at the gurudwara. I went into the main prayer hall where the Guru Granth Sahib was kept, bowed down to it with my forehead touching the ground in traditional Sikh fashion, and went and sat among the congregation.

The Sikhs had ten gurus from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the Granth or Holy Scripture is considered to be the eleventh or living guru, and through the day verses from the Granth are read out in the gurudwara. The entire religious activity centres round the Granth, even the Sikh wedding ceremony. The wedding is performed by reading verses while the bride and groom walk around the Granth four times, as opposed to the Hindu wedding where the couple walks seven rounds around the sacred fire. This has prompted naughty gibes from several of my Hindu friends that the Sikhs perform just half a wedding.

That day somebody was narrating a story about the 10<sup>th</sup> guru Gobind Singh and afterwards a beautiful, melodious *kirtan* was chanted. I sat in the peaceful environs of the gurudwara for half an hour, and while coming out accepted my share of the *kadaah prashaad* from one of the volunteers. The *kadaah prashaad* is a delicious sweet pudding made of flour, sometimes mixed with *suji* or semolina, and a good amount of oil and is the traditional offering given by the temple to the devotees.

After savouring the *prashaad* I walked in the direction of the Red fort.

### **Building of Shahjahanabad**

The ShahJahannama of Inayat Khan mentions the building of the city of Shahjahanabad briefly. It was decided by Emperor Shah Jahan that a grand fort was to be built along the banks of the river Jumna, in a place with genial climate (whether Delhi's climate can be called genial is a moot point). It was to be constructed at the site near Salimgarh, and so construction began in the year 1639, at an auspicious time, as settled by the astrologers.

"Throughout the Imperial dominions wherever artificers could be found whether plain stone-cutters, ornamental sculptors, masons or carpenters, by the mandate worthy of implicit obedience, they were all collected together, and multitudes of common labourers were employed in the work." The construction was completed in the year 1648. It cost 60 lakhs of rupees and nine years three months to complete yet another of Shah Jahan's dream projects.

Bernier's description of Shahjahanabad of the 1600s starts by stating that the houses here were not as grand as those in Paris, but were apt for the hot climate of Hindustan. The Red fort or the Citadel, as he calls it, had a partial moat surrounding it on all sides except where the river flowed and was filled with water. The lush-green garden nearby created a beautiful contrast against the red sandstone walls of the fort. Next to it was the main square and the two most important streets of Delhi emanated from here. Then there were the numerous narrower streets crossing each other forming a network, but with little symmetry. The houses here belonged to the *amirs* or the rich merchants; not many were made fully of brick or stone. Some of the houses had thatched roofs and clay walls. The lower orders had houses with mud walls and straw roofs. He says that in a particular year sixty thousand roofs were burnt in three fires, giving an idea of how populated Delhi was even in those times.

According to Bernier what was considered a good house was the one which had a courtyard, a garden surrounding it on all sides for the wind to blow from every direction, water basins and a cellar or *tehkhana*. Due to their depth these *tehkhanas* remained cool even during the sizzling daytime hours. Some houses had mats made of the *khus* plant hung in the doorways and windows, and these were kept constantly wetted so that the air entering the house was cool (My mother recalled that as a youngster even she had seen the practice of hanging wetted *khus* mats on windows, the result being that the room would cool down just as though being cooled by an air cooler. With air conditioning becoming ubiquitous this ancient practice lost out to the march of technology). The interior of a good house had its floor covered with a thick mattress, with finely embroidered covers, and a liberal number of cushions for the master of the house or the guests to rest upon. There were other decorations like flower-pots and vases, and decorated ceilings.

Bernier confirms the sorry fact that the rich lived a very comfortable, sumptuous life while the others lived miserably; this was because of the exploitation of the common man at the hands of the *amirs*. These *amirs*

would commission an article, sometimes forcibly, and then pay the artisan a pittance, or as was their whim.

### Inside the Red fort

Bernier's description continues that once inside the main gate of the fort there was a long, wide street with a water channel running in its centre, and raised platforms or *diwans*, at its sides; Bernier was talking about the Lahori gate here. The *diwans* were used by officials during daytime to conduct their occupations. Similarly, on entering the other gate also there was a street with *diwans* and bordered by shops, covered by a high, arched roof. Besides these two there were other smaller streets with *diwans* or alcoves, flower-gardens and fountains punctuated by water channels.

Next was the *naqqarkhana* or the music chamber where ceremonial drums, trumpets and cymbals were played at various hours of the day. Crossing the *naqqarkhana* one came to the Diwan-i-Am, or the general audience chamber, where people from all walks and stations had access to the King. This *diwan* was a raised hall with many arched pillars, and open on three sides, with a wall separating it from the seraglio on the fourth side. Here, in the middle and at a much raised level was the seat of the Emperor, where he sat with his sons, while a eunuch swatted away the flies, or fanned him with the *punkha*. The King spent about an hour and a half to two hours there. From here the King examined his horses and elephants for battle-readiness, and other exotic species of birds and animals kept for his pleasure. Interestingly, the Emperor himself heard the petitions brought to him while in Diwan-i-Am, and also dedicated two hours each week to adjudicate select cases of his common subjects, and also attend courts of the other *qazis*.

Behind the Diwan-i-Am were the Diwan-i-Khas and the adjoining *hammam*. In this part of the fortress only the *amirs* were allowed to meet the Emperor for conducting state business in a leisurely manner.

Bernier also gives a second-hand glowing account of the seraglio as being a beautiful space with numerous apartments of sizes according to the ranks of the occupants, each apartment having access to running water channels. It was a cool, shady, luxuriant place punctuated by gardens, fountains and retreats to keep the heat away.

Today, as I went inside the Red fort the flaming summer sun was at its peak. There was, as always, a whole crowd of people waiting in queue to get in; the Red fort is easily one of the most popular tourist spots of Delhi. I entered via the imposing Lahori Gate. The huge three-storeyed gateway was flanked by octagonal towers with *chhatris* on the top. It had the typical recessed-arch entrance and was crowned by a set of seven identical, domed *chhatris* standing side by side with two elevated *chhatris* at the ends. The fort is recognized all over the country by this front view of the gate.

Once inside there was the Chhata Bazaar or the 'Roofed Market'. It was an arcaded double-storey market with shops on both sides, just as would have been in the glory days of the fort. On walking straight ahead I directly reached the triple-storeyed building called the *naubatkhana* or *naqqarkhana* mentioned by Bernier. There was an arched gateway to pass through. The other side of the *naubatkhana*, the side visible to the Emperor, had very beautiful flower patterns in relief on the red stone.

Walking on I reached the Diwan-i-Am. This Hall of Public Audience had a front view that consisted of nine arched rows and two *chhatris* on the front corners. The hall was replete with arch-pillars running criss-cross. It was predominantly made of red stone, except for the central, raised marble platform with a curved canopy where the Emperor's throne would have been placed. The wall behind the platform was also made of marble and had gorgeous patterns engraved in it and inlaid with multi-colour stone, giving a glimpse of its long-lost glory.

After crossing the Diwan-i-Am I came to the area which was out of bounds to the common people in the olden days. I moved to my left and reached the Hayat Baksh garden. The garden had two identical pavilions in the south and north direction facing each other called Sawan and Bhadon, which are the names of the rainy months in India. In between them was the Zafar Mahal which was later created by Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1842, as the ASI plaque informed. Since the Sawan and Bhadon pavilions were for royal usage only, they were made of marble. The back wall and the supporting pillars were as ornate as those of the Diwan-i-Am, with the same pietra dura flower patterns inlaid with multi-colour stone. This particular motif was found in most of the

buildings used exclusively for royalty. In front of these two pavilions there were channels for water surrounded by flower-beds, with walkways bridging the channels.

The Zafar Mahal lying in-between had been made of the cheaper red stone, probably due to the financial constraints experienced by Bahadur Shah Zafar. It was a small pavilion, kind of kiosk, in the middle of a tank. My mind travelled back to the days of Zafar when, on the royal order, the tank must have been filled with water and the pavilion must have looked like a wonderful, private pleasure in the middle of water.

I retraced my steps to the backside of the Diwan-i-Am and moved straight ahead. I came to the last and most private row of buildings. Starting from the extreme left and moving to the right I could see the Shah Burj, the Hira Mahal, The Hammam and adjacent Moti Masjid, the Diwan-i-Khas, Khas Mahal, the Rang Mahal and the Mumtaz Mahal, all standing in a straight line, underlying the symmetry present in the original plan of the palace.

The Shah Burj at the north-east was where water used to be brought to the fort to an elevated point and from there the network of water channels carried it to the other parts of the fort. On this elevation there was situated the small pavilion called the Hira Mahal and close by was the Hammam or bath-house. Next to it stood the Moti Masjid built by Aurangzeb. It was his private prayer chamber, though it was also used by the ladies of the harem. It had a small courtyard with its own small tank for ablutions.

Moving on, the next edifice was the Diwan-i-Khas where the King and his chief officials convened. Made of marble it was much more ornate than the Diwan-i-Am; almost the entire space was covered with carvings or inlaid flower patterns. There were *chhatris* on the four corners of the roof, which was said to have been covered with silver which was stripped off by plunderers. A water channel flowed through the middle of this chamber and close by was a platform where the King's throne was kept.

Adjacent to Diwan-i-Khas and serving as the Emperor's own quarters was the Khas Mahal, again made of white marble but with incredibly beautiful *jaali* work and carving in relief. On the eastern end was the octagonal Musamman Burj where the Emperor stood and showed himself to his people daily. Most emperors were very particular about this practice of showing their persons to the populace lest the people think that the Emperor was ill or dead and rebellions break out.

Close to the Khas Mahal was one of the bigger royal apartments called the Rang Mahal or the Palace of Colours, so named due to its interior originally being painted in various colours. Some distance away was the Mumtaz Mahal, named after Shah Jahan's beloved queen. It served as the seraglio of the Mughals. It was also used as a jail after the Uprising of 1857.

Other than these Mughal buildings I could also see numerous barrack-like structures which were put up by the British after 1857.

After the Uprising the British realized that the Red fort and its ramparts gave a bird's-eye view of the city and appropriated the place for its army. The old map of the Red fort was drastically changed. Some of the old imperial buildings like the Diwan-e-Khas, Moti Masjid, the Hammam, Rang Mahal, Mumtaz Mahal, Diwan-i-Am, Zafar Mahal, Sawan and Bhadon Pavilions, Hira Mahal, Naqqar Khana the Shah and Asad Burjs and the two principal gates were left untouched, but the Hayat Baksh garden and Mehtab Bagh were demolished. The other buildings like the stables and the royal kitchen and the canal were also done away with. The planned, axial layout of the Red fort was now just a vast tract of land where barracks for the troops were built up.

In his book 'History of Indian and Eastern architecture' James Ferguson blasts the British administration for erecting these barracks. He says "The whole of the harem courts of the palace were swept off the face of the earth to make way for a hideous British barrack, without those who carried out this fearful piece of vandalism thinking it even worthwhile to make a plan of what they were destroying, or preserving any record of the most splendid palace in the world". He mentions that after the Mutiny of 1857 the Rang Mahal was used as a mess and adds "Being now situated in the middle of a British barrack-yard, they look like precious stones torn from their settings in some exquisite piece of Oriental jeweller's work and set at random in a bed of the commonest plaster". As mentioned, the reason given for this act of vandalism was that it was necessary to place the garrison of Delhi in security in case of an emergency, but Ferguson discounts it by saying that without destroying any of the original structures also there was more than enough space for the garrison.

It would be almost another half a century before good sense prevailed and conservation efforts to protect the

fort would take place.

-X-X-

It was the last week of May. The temperature was a blistering forty-one degrees celcius. I went to the Chandni Chowk area. I started the day by visiting the Church Mission Road where I lunched on delicious, spicy vegetarian *biryani* which was essentially a lot of vegetables in gravy mixed with rice. I topped it with a huge glass of salty *lassi* to beat the sweltering weather.

From there I went to ancient spice market in the Khari Baoli street and inhaled the pungent mixed aroma of various spices, pepper, chillies, ground ginger, turmeric, caraway seeds, cinnamon bark, asafoetida, fennel seeds, anything and everything one could think of. Today Chandni Chowk and the small lanes and by-lanes around it form a business hub of Delhi. Walking through the area one can see that every lane has its own business specialty. Khari Baoli is known for its spice market. At one end of the spice market is a lane selling only bags, while near the other end is a lane specializing in optical goods. Then there is the Bhagirathi Palace area which is a huge electronics market next to the Red fort. I noticed how narrow the lanes of Shahjahanabad were, but on reflection realized that three hundred years back, with no cars, or even bikes around, the only traffic on these roads must have been the horse-driven carriages or humans. At that time these lanes must have seemed broad enough even for a leading city of the East. The summer sun had started taking its toll on me and I decided to move on.

On reaching the Fatehpuri Masjid I took a quick glance inside the beautiful mosque and then walked to Ballimaran Street where I went to Mirza Ghalib's *haveli* (or whatever remains of it). It is here that he spent the last few, miserable years of his life. It had fallen on bad times and even a decade back it was being used as a store-house and cooler factory. Finally, after years of government apathy it had now been converted into a museum. Only 2 rooms of the original *haveli* survived, guarded by a caretaker who was more or less oblivious of the people coming there. He seemed more interested in catching up with last night's sleep. The museum contained a bust of Mirza Ghalib and some boards showing couplets from his poems. Not much of a museum but not less than a pilgrimage spot for Ghalib lovers. Once smitten by Ghalib mania few people can resist delving deeper into his *diwan* (book of poems). His poems have a way of speaking to everyone's heart, arousing deep-hidden memories, making him the foremost poet of India even a century and a half after his death. Who else could come up with something as magical as

*Hazaron kwahishein aisi ki har khwahish pe dam nikle*

*Bahut nikle mere armaan lekin phir bhi kam nikle...*

(The Heart has a thousand desires, each desire more urgent than the other  
Many have been fulfilled, but some will have to abate)

or wrench the heart with a lovely couplet like

*Toote hain sheesha dil haaye dil itne ke ehl-e-dard,*

*Rakhte hain paaon khaak par sau baar dekh kar...*

(So many hearts have been broken, oh, broken hearts  
That I look a hundred times even before stepping on ashes)

or the haunting, yet enchanting

*kitna khouf hota hay shaam kay andheron main,*

*pooch un parindo sey jin key ghar nahi hote*

(How fearful is darkness!

Ask those birds who fly about without a homestead to return)

I trudged on to the other end of Ballimaran. I reached the Chawri Bazaar road and another two-three minute walk brought me in sight of the grand Jama Masjid.

The first time I saw the Jama Masjid I was overwhelmed by its majesty. Started in 1650 under Shah Jahan's command this mosque took six years to build.

Bernier too was impressed with the mosque and describes it as a beautiful, well-proportioned edifice, and if such a structure were to be built even in a place like his native Paris it would be admired by the people there. He narrates that the Emperor visited the mosque every Friday to perform *namaaz*, and the manner of doing so was pretty grand. The streets from the Red fort to the mosque were first watered to settle down the dust, and to keep the path cool. A few hundred musketeers would line the streets on both sides, and five or six horsemen would form the advance party. They would ensure that the way was kept clear for the Emperor. After all this had been done, the great man would appear at the gate of the fortress, sometimes on a caparisoned elephant, and at other times, carried on a richly decorated litter, supported by eight equally decorated men. Finally would follow a number of *umara*, on horseback or on their *palkis*.

The long flight of stairs leading to the main gate of the masjid was filled with groups of people sitting and chatting merrily. This triple-storey gate was an elaborate construction with a recessed, central arch and galleries on both sides, on every floor. On the top there were numerous domed-arches standing side-by-side and *chhatris* on all four edges, making it look like a sister-structure of the Red fort which loomed on the horizon behind.

The mosque's humongous, rectangular, almost square, courtyard with flooring made entirely of red sandstone, made the mosque look like a vast expanse of red. At the periphery there were shaded, arched walkways to shelter the devotees, especially during inclement weather like today.

The main prayer hall was on a raised platform and was covered with three gigantic, white-marble domes with fine finials, the middle being higher than the other two domes. At the two extremities were tall minarets made of red stone punctuated by thin, white stripes. The contrast of white marble over light red sandstone seemed to be the main theme of the *masjid* and gave it a very soothing character. The main entrance of the prayer hall was a huge *iwan* or recessed arch, which was almost as high as the dome behind it, thus partially obliterating it from view. The flat façade of the *iwan*, called the *pishtaq*, was of white marble while the recessing section being made of red and white intermingling with each other somewhere in stripes, and elsewhere in various patterns. The inside of the hall was everywhere covered with patterns in relief, with the same interplay of red and white stone, but thankfully not overdone.

Right in the middle of the vast red courtyard of the masjid was a small pool of entirely white marble, with a fountain in the centre, where devotees could perform their ablutions before performing *namaaz*. In the mid-day May sun this pool seemed like an oasis in the middle of the desert. The red sandstone on the floor was sizzling and the mosque authorities had helpfully laid carpets from the gates to the pool and prayer hall. The people were careful not to step outside the carpets, but there were no carpets between the prayer hall and the peripheral, arched walkways. People crossing over had to scamper their way across. This made for an amusing sight for all to see and I spent a few minutes watching this scene until I myself had to cross over to the walkways. I made a dash for it but in the few moments that my feet touched the hot sandstone I could feel the beginning of a blister.

The masjid is a popular destination for tourists; the atmosphere is almost carnival. Everytime I have been there I have seen hordes of foreigners happily clicking pictures of the panorama. The masjid has strict rules about dressing. One cannot enter with arms or legs uncovered. Thus many tourists are obliged to buy ludicrous cotton gowns with horrid prints from the vendors nearby to cover themselves appropriately.

When I was walking around the main prayer hall I saw a man seated on one side, resting comfortably against a pillar, beckoning me in his direction. He was dressed in decent, traditional attire and wearing a skull cap; I thought he was one of the officials working in the mosque. When I reached near him he said in a matter-of-fact manner "Give me a ten-rupee note. I need it". He was begging but his tone was neither supplicating nor beseeching; it amused me immensely. I ignored him and walked away but had to admire the man's style.

Later I found a quiet place in the cloister, seated myself comfortably and scanned the wide courtyard. On to my left I could see a lot of grain had been laid on a patch to feed the birds. There was a group of pigeons feeding on the grain even in the unbearable heat. A man came and opened another packet of wheat grain for the pigeons and walked away. More pigeons came to feed on the grain. A sudden loud sound, like a gun-shot filled the air, and the group flew away in tandem, making it a photo-moment. I moved my gaze to the pool in the middle and saw a group of tourists sitting around it like panting harts at a pond, wetting themselves with water. To my right, and closer to me, was the main prayer hall, and inside it I could see an eclectic mix of people. Some were involved in a private prayer to the Almighty, others were seated quietly on the marble floor, yet others were involved in gossip. It reminded me of my previous visit, almost a year back, when I had come there during the holy month of Ramzan. At that time also there were many devotees inside the prayer hall, some sitting unusually quiet and others lying on their backs, trying to still their pangs of hunger as there were many more hours to pass before sunset. The people were there, undoubtedly to seek spiritual strength and stamina to complete their fasts. In an unthinking moment, I opened my water bottle and drank a few gulps; there were a hundred eyes on me that very moment!!! My cheeks blushed with shame as realization dawned and I slunk out of there immediately.

But today the warm and soothing breeze in the elevated mosque was lulling me to sleep, my stomach full of food. The book in which I was writing notes was pushed aside and I went into dreamland. I woke up after a few minutes later to find it was almost time for *azaan*. I carried my shoes out of the mosque and went to the gaudily painted Sarmad Shaheed *dargah* outside.

Actually there were two *mazaars* side-by-side, so the building was painted one half in deep green and the other half in deep red. The green side belonged to the saint Abul Qasim Hare Bhare Shah and the red section belonged to a Sufi called Sarmad. The *dargah* was just a small room enclosing the *mazaars*; inside the *dargah* also I could see that the *mazaar* of Hare Bhare Shah was painted green while the *mazaar* of Sarmad was blood-red, maybe signifying the bloody end he met. This was a modest *dargah* and there was just a single person sitting next to Sarmad Shaheed's tombstone, his forehead placed against it, his hands joined in a fervent plea. Adjoining the *dargah* a book-shop was selling a booklet narrating the legend of these two saints. According to the booklet Emperor Shah Jahan had a dream in which he saw the design of a mosque but in the morning upon waking it had faded from his mind. He took it as a hint that the heavens desired a mosque of that very design to be built. He offered a reward to anybody who would submit a design of the future mosque which matched with the one he saw in his dream. The design that eventually won through was presented by a cook of his. When the Emperor called the cook to reward him the latter told the Emperor that it was with his *guru* Hare Bhare Shah's help that he was able to conceive the design. On being informed of the Emperor's quest for a design of the mosque the *guru* had given his quilt to the cook and asked him to cover his face with it and draw the design that came to his mind through divine inspiration. So this saint was responsible for the design of the Jama Masjid and thus upon his death, a year before the mosque was completed, he was buried in front of it.

Then turning to the story of Sarmad, the booklet informed that he was originally an affluent Jew from Armenia but had converted to Islam in his search for the Ultimate Truth. By the time he came to India he was also a poet of note. During one of his poetic sessions he met a charming Hindu boy and fell in love with him and they started living together. At some point Sarmad also gave up wearing clothes.

Later, when he moved to Delhi he also got acquainted with Hare Bhare Khan, as well as found an acolyte in Dara Shikoh. Sarmad had a peculiar habit. He is supposed to have read only the first two words of the *kalima* "La Illah" citing the reason that he had not yet seen his God. All this piqued the conservative Aurangzeb and he gave the order, though very reluctantly because Sarmad had become much revered in Shahjahanabad, of putting the saint to death by beheading. This happened three years after Aurangzeb ascended the throne. But my booklet told me that the story did not end there. Fantastically, after his head was cut off, the severed head finally recited the entire *Kalima Tayyaba*. This version goes on to state that post the beheading Sarmad was furious and carried his own head on his palm and ran up the stairs of the masjid to air his grievance to the Prophet. But Hare Bhare Shah spoke to him from his tomb and convinced him to lay down his life in accordance with the laws of creation.



Even Bernier talks about Sarmad:

“a celebrated Fakir named Sarmet, who paraded the streets of Dehli as naked as when he came into the world. He despised equally the promises and threats of Aurangzeb, and underwent at length the punishment of decapitation from his obstinate refusal to put on wearing apparel.”

His beheading was seen as an act of martyrdom and his tomb became a shrine of the *shaheed*. Today Sarmad is known for his beautiful quatrains or *rubaiyat*, full of Sufi ardour for the divine. One of the quatrains will give an idea of the kind of man Sarmad was:

Sarmad! You have received Godly love,  
By His grace you have received God-consciousness,  
Do not lose it,  
On seeing the sword of the executioner,  
Your's journey's goal,  
Is the House of Muhammad

### Eating in the Chandni Chowk area

The Chandni Chowk area can also be categorized as a gastronomer's delight. There is the famous, historic Parathewali Gali where one can savour tasty and richly oily *parathas* of all imaginable varieties including some unimaginable ones like the *rabdi paratha*. Of the original shops which made this lane famous only three or four shops still remain and serve clientèle from all over Delhi and around. There is hardly any space to walk in the *gali*, yet food aficionados wait in queue patiently outside the full-to-the-brim *dhabas* until they get place to sit. Even when one's turn arrives one has to share the table with other foodies. But the wait is rewarded with a plate of delicious, deep-fried *parathas* served with *aloo ki subzi* (potato curry) and pickles.

The area next to the Jama Masjid is also popular with the Delhi folks for authentic Mughlai style non-vegetarian dining. I was introduced to this place by a friend and his wife who are true-blue epicures, Delhi natives who claim to know each corner of Delhi which serves gourmet food. The first visit proved to be a bit of a setback. The friend had brought a bottle of Coke mixed with rum and while we got out of the car he handed the bottle to me. We walked to one of the restaurants and had to wait outside for our turn. After a minute or two of waiting one of the elderly waiters there grabbed my bottle, opened it and poured its contents in the cap of the bottle and smelled it. Incensed by the smell of alcohol he ordered us in front of the crowd of people to either leave the restaurant or throw away the bottle. We made a humiliated retreat and left the bottle inside the car before returning to the restaurant.

However after this initial hiccup I warmed up to the place. The extensive menu left one spoilt for choice. My personal favourite was the *shami* kebab with *rumaali roti*, followed by delectable mugh biryani or nargisi kofta. The meal ended with a dessert of *phirni* studded with dry fruits and with just the right level of sweetness. The vegetarian menu here was pretty limited. On the return visit with another friend who is a vegetarian we ordered a simple meal of *daal* and *subzi* with *roti*. I could sense the waiters looking askance at our choice of dishes, no doubt feeling we were lowering the prestige of the place by ordering ordinary vegetarian fare.

## The Decline of the Mughal Empire (1700-early 1800s)

The internal decay of the Mughal empire had started much before the 1700s. Aurangzeb's zealous version of Islam, his efforts at proselytisation and aversion to other faiths had alienated a major part of the population. In the century following his death his descendants steadily lost control over Indian territory and by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were rulers in name only, with just a few miles radius of area surrounding Delhi under them. The decline of the Mughals coincided with the rise of the Marathas and the Sikhs, and later the British.

Immediately after Aurangzeb's death the battle for kingship began between his sons Azam Shah and Bahadur Shah, the latter being very reluctant to fight his younger brother. Azam Shah was killed in the battle of Jajau by being hit with a musket ball in the forehead; his head was severed from his dead body and brought to Bahadur Shah. The bodies of Azam Shah and his sons, Bidar Bakht and Wala-jah, who were also slain in the battle were sent to Humayun's tomb for burial.

Bahadur Shah ascended to the throne, but his youngest brother was still to be tackled. Aurangzeb is supposed to have stated in his will that Kam Baksh should be left alone if he would content himself with Bijapur and Hyderabad. But Kam Baksh started minting coins in his own name, thus styling himself as an independent sovereign. This led to the battle with Bahadur Shah in which the younger brother was killed, and the whole of Hindustan passed into the hands of Bahadur Shah. But he was already an old man and ruled for only 5 years till his death in February of 1712. The battle for succession started between his four sons even as he lay dying, and his dead body was sent to Delhi to be buried only a month after his death, after the new king had been decided. His tomb is in the Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Dargah in Mehrauli.

Azim-ush-shan was the most powerful among the four princes and it was wagered that he would become the next king after Bahadur Shah. But fate had other plans and brought the two brothers, Jahan Shah and Rafi-ush-shan, to Jahandar Shah's camp; this alliance was brought about by Zulfiqar Khan who later became the *wazir*. It was decided that if they defeated Azim-ush-shan then Hindustan could be divided between them, with Jahandar Shah as the emperor. They succeeded in their plan against all odds and Azim-ush-shan was slain, but later on they fell out with each other. Jahandar Shah defeated and killed Jahan Shah in battle and Rafi-ush-shan followed suit. Thus Jahandar Shah claimed entire Hindustan for himself. It is said that along with Bahadur Shah's corpse the biers of his other three sons were sent to be buried in Delhi.

The visible signs of decay of the Mughal rule appeared during Jahandar's short rule. He was a profligate in every sense of the word; even though he was a man of around fifty he indulged every childish fantasy that took hold of his mind. The historian Jadunath Sarkar mentions some of them in 'Later Mughals' edited by him. Delhi was illuminated three times a month and this consumed so much oil that the rate of oil sky-rocketed; so ghee was used instead till that also became dear. Jahandar seemed to be living just for the happiness of his favourite concubine Lal Kunwar. It is said that he bestowed upon her an allowance of 2 crores of rupees per annum so she would live grandly like a royal. She was given all the privileges of a royal personage, like being allowed to carry the imperial umbrella with her retinue and allowing her party the right to beat drum. The Emperor was so besotted by her that he would fulfil even her most outrageous and criminal demands. One day while watching the river she announced her desire to see a boat full of people drowning, and Jahandar acquiesced. He also granted favours to her entire family (of musicians) to the disgust of even the members of his own coterie. At night these musicians would gather around Lal Kunwar and the Emperor and would get so drunk during the course of the night that they would sometimes manhandle him, but Jahandar bore all that for fear of displeasing Lal Kunwar. Lal Kunwar was also the cause of the souring of relations between Jahandar and his sons and other relatives. Sarkar says both he and his concubine would bathe naked in the tank of the Chirag-e-Delhi *dargah* every Sunday to get heavenly help in conceiving a child, as was the common belief in those days.

Azim-ush-Shan's second son Farrukhsiyar took upon himself to depose Jahandar. At the outset he had little chance of prevailing but he received great help from the Sayyid brothers Hasan Ali Khan (afterwards Abdullah Khan) and Husain Ali Khan of Barha who joined hands with him at the prince's mother's importuning; the men of the Barha Sayyid clan had been military leaders under the Mughals since the time of Akbar. Soon others too joined Farrukhsiyar's standard and money was raised for the campaign by hook or by crook. Jahandar's son Aziz-ud-din was sent to fight with Farrukhsiyar but he left the battlefield and returned to Agra. Then Jahandar

decided to take matters in his hand but realized he had not the money to pay his troops, since a huge amount of the accumulated wealth of the previous generations had been squandered in the few preceding months. To pay up the troops the remaining gold in the treasury was used; that was not enough so gold vessels were used next. The gold and silver found in the workshops was also appropriated as well as the jewels. Expensive tapestries were taken down and used to pay up for the defence against Farrukhsiyar. When even this was not found to be enough to pay for the troops the gold used in the ceilings of the palace was broken up and distributed. Finally the store-houses were opened and goods stored inside, stored there since Babur's time, were passed on to the soldiers. When Jahandar's army reached Agra fort some copper bricks, lying there since Akbar's rule, were sold to pay the troops' wages. This was in 1712, just five years after Aurangzeb's death. Jahandar's army fought against Farrukhsiyar's in Agra and was overwhelmed while Jahandar Shah left the battlefield and fled to Delhi with Lal Kunwar. When he reached Delhi he was handed over to Farrukhsiyar's faction by his *wazir* Zulfiqar Khan and the *wazir's* father. Soon both Jahandar Shah and Zulfiqar Khan were assassinated on Farrukhsiyar's orders and their bodies paraded around Delhi; later Jahandar was also buried in Humayun's tomb.

While the Mughals were busy with their infighting, the power of the Sikhs, which were predominantly people of the peasant fold, was on the rise. After the death of their tenth guru Gobind Singh in 1708 they had found an aggressive leader in Banda Bahadur. He set out to cut down the Mughal power in the northern part of India. Many towns were sacked and plundered by his Sikhs, most notably Sonapat, Kaithal, Samana, Sirhind, Saharanpur, Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur. Khushwant Singh says in 'A history of the Sikhs' that the whole region between Jumna and the Sutlej was under his sway. Khafi Khan writes that the Sikhs 'dressed as *fakirs*' were a terror for the Mughal army. The Mughal soldiers had come to believe that Banda was a sorcerer and they were so afraid of his magical powers that rumour sprang up about his magic having made the Sikhs invincible and unassailable. It was also thought that he could transmute himself into an animal. The Emperor was roused to action and sent an expedition to kill Banda. After a long siege where the Sikhs ran out of food and fodder Banda and his followers surrendered towards the end of 1715, thus bringing an end to his six-year reign of terror.

Banda and seven hundred of his Sikhs were brought to Delhi as prisoners along with seven hundred bullock carts full of severed Sikh heads. Jadunath Sarkar states that Banda was seated in a cage on an elephant, dressed as a mock-prince and paraded around Delhi along with his comrades, while on the sides were Mughal soldiers carrying Sikh heads pierced by spears. Somebody had also impaled a cat at the end of a pole; the cat had exhausted all its nine lives. Eye-witnesses say that a hundred Sikhs were killed everyday for a week and all of them without exception accepted their fate cheerfully, even eagerly. Banda was kept alive to make him divulge the hiding place of the wealth he had plundered. After three months of torture Banda and his select followers were taken to the *dargah* of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and there his four year old son was killed in front of him and his liver was forced into Banda's mouth. This done, Banda's eye, foot and hands were cut off one-by-one and finally he was beheaded.

The killing of Banda subdued the Sikhs, but not for long. The Sikhs would continue to be a thorn in the Mughal side, and their power would reach its zenith under the rule of Ranjit Singh.

Back in 1713 Farrukhsiyar became king, and Abdullah Khan was made *wazir*. One of Farrukhsiyar's acts was to blind some of the princes including his own younger brother Humayun Bakht so that they could never aspire to become emperor. Almost as soon as he came to the throne due to his suspicious and fickle nature his coterie was able to induce him to believe that the Sayyid brothers were aiming to dethrone him. To add fuel to fire around the same time there was a prophecy doing the rounds that after the Mughals the next ruler would be a Sayyid. So he fell out with the Sayyid brothers and started plotting their downfall. The Sayyids went on the defensive and tried to mend fences but after seeing the Emperor's continued hostility and intrigues and efforts to get them assassinated they were pushed to the brink. At length they were forced to assume the offensive and decided to depose him and to put another Timurid prince on the throne. When the day of his dethronement arrived Farrukhsiyar went and hid in the harem and would not come out. The Sayyids took hold

of Rafi-ud-Darjat, a prince and the son of Rafi-ush-Shan, and placed him on the Peacock Throne. Then the Sayyids' men broke into the women's apartments where the Emperor was hiding in a room and ruthlessly dragged him out into the Diwan-e-Khas. There Abdullah Khan gave the order for his blinding by passing a needle through his eyes, and he was imprisoned inside the fort.

He was treated shabbily by the Sayyids when in confinement by not being given proper food or water but this did not deter the Emperor from trying to reclaim his throne by offering rewards to the Sayyids and their men. After almost two months in captivity they had him assassinated, much to the annoyance of the populace of Delhi; this was in the year 1719. He was buried in Humayun's tomb, just as his father Azim-ush-shan, a few years earlier. Interestingly, his widow, the daughter of Raja Ajit Singh, was sent back to her father's place where after a purification ceremony she re-entered the Hindu fold. This incident was without a precedent and was met with stiff opposition from the conservatives in Delhi who felt it was against Muhammadan law. Meanwhile at Agra fort a farce was being played out. Nekusiyar, the son of Prince Muhammad Akbar who was Aurangzeb's fourth son, was proclaimed emperor. This Nekusiyar's family had been imprisoned by Aurangzeb after his father had turned renegade and he had never been outside the Agra fort. He started negotiations with the Sayyid brothers to turn over the kingship to him but the brothers did not aver. Meanwhile in Delhi Rafi-ud-Darjat was expectedly a puppet king while the control lay with the Sayyids. The Sayyids behaved as they felt fit; the pleasure-loving Abdullah Khan is supposed to have whisked away two or three of the imperial harem's beautiful inmates. Another allegation made against him is that he made overtures towards Queen Inayat Banu, praising her long, curly locks. The queen spurned her unwanted lover by cutting off her locks and throwing them at him. This sham reign lasted for about three months. Rafi-ud-Darjat had contracted tuberculosis and was wasting away towards his death. Less than a week before his death, at his insistence, the Sayyids put his elder brother Rafi-ud-Daulah on the throne. The Sayyids turned their attention to Nekusiyar and Husain Ali Khan went to Agra and besieged the fort and at length Nekusiyar surrendered, and was dispatched to Salimgarh fort jail. The new Emperor also turned out to be as sickly as his brother and it did not help matters that he was an opium addict. After a reign of four and a half months he passed away.

Next prince Roshan Akhtar, grand-son of Emperor Bahadur Shah and son of Jahan Shah, was made emperor by the Sayyids and he continued to rule till 1748 under the name Muhammad Shah 'Rangila'. Early in his reign the real power still lay in the hands of the Sayyid brothers.

A few months after he came to the throne, in the year 1720, Husain Ali Khan was assassinated while he and Emperor Muhammad Shah had encamped on their way to the Deccan. It is not known whether Muhammad Shah was aware of this plot to assassinate Husain Ali Khan. But the effect was to antagonize Abdullah Khan and so now two opposing parties were formed, one under the Emperor and the other under Abdullah Khan; they both started preparing for the upcoming battle. In Delhi Abdullah Khan raised Prince Ibrahim, the eldest son of Rafi-ush-shan, to the throne.

On the day of battle Abdullah Khan's army was much larger than Muhammad Shah's. But after a battle of two days and many desertions on the side of the Sayyids Abdullah Khan was defeated and made prisoner. The newly crowned Prince Ibrahim was captured and sent back to prison. As long as Abdullah Khan was alive, though he was in prison, the Emperor's mind was not at peace and so two years later Abdullah Khan was poisoned, thereby ending the ascendancy of the Sayyid brothers over the Mughals.

This shows how the battles of accession to the crown of Hindustan weakened the Mughal empire. Right from the time of Timur Lang the princes had regularly fought their brothers to ascend to the vacant throne, and even after coming to Hindustan these battles were fought in almost every generation, since the Mughals did not follow the principle of primogeniture. To prepare for the battle a prince would raise an army and would offer just about anything to the enlisted mercenaries as was the case between Farrukhsiyar and the Sayyids. The idea was to get to the throne first and then later give a thought as to how Hindustan could be governed wisely. This also had the adverse effect that due to these battles the braves were forced to side with one party or the other; the victors shared the spoils while the vanquished suffered a terrible fate. So the best way to survive in such uncertainty was to be opportunistic, and this meant that a soldier's loyalty to one master was not allowed to develop. Furthermore, the victorious prince, after becoming emperor, was always anxious about possible

revolts and conspiracies by the other princes and so it was the practice among the Mughals to keep them imprisoned in Salimgarh jail. In the extreme case they were even blinded since a blind man could not become emperor.

Thus Aurangzeb's death saw a period of instability where emperors came and went in a flurry before some semblance of stability was provided by Muhammad Shah. However, it was in his reign that control was lost over huge parts of the empire like Bengal and Awadh and the empire started shrinking. Hyderabad was under the governorship of the Nizam-ul-Mulk who was also the *wazir*, but after prolonged friction of the suspicious Emperor with him the Nizam resigned from the post of *wazir* and left Delhi and assumed the role of the sovereign of Hyderabad, though the Emperor was still nominally the head.

The Marathas kept becoming stronger and more audacious day by day as they undertook raids into successively deeper territories falling under the Mughal rule. After having worsted the Mughals in Bundelkhand a part of the Bundelkhand territory was ceded to them. In many cases the chiefs governing under the Mughals compromised with the Marathas and paid them ransom to be left alone. In 1737 the Marathas under Baji Rao even reached the gates of Delhi and plundered the outskirts. Finally in 1738 Baji Rao conquered and won Malwa from the Mughals.

Muhammad Shah was a mere shadow of the former glorious Mughals and does not receive much kindness from history. He came to the throne at a very early age, and showed great immaturity in handling the affairs of the kingdom. He was indolent and was mostly immersed in seeking pleasure and debauchery, and loath to tackle the problems of the populace head-on; most decisions were taken by the members of the court. His court was divided into factions, filling the ears of the Emperor with lies and calumny, while the young monarch kept making mistake after mistake to squander his kingdom.

'Later Mughals' says that one good act of Muhammad Shah was to abolish the much hated poll-tax for good, though it had yielded four crores of rupees; this indicates that he was not a religious zealot, but another interesting incident, early in his reign, shows him to be of a weak, vacillatory nature. A clerk in the royal service had converted from Hinduism to Islam while his wife and child had remained faithful to their original creed. He very foolishly brought a complaint before the *qazi* that since his daughter was a minor at the time of his conversion she was naturally a Muslim. The *qazi* instituted an inquiry into the matter and sent the girl into lock-up while the inquiry was being conducted. The girl confessed that she had attained puberty through menses a few months after her father's conversion, and the *qazi* pronounced her a Muslim. The Hindus of Delhi appealed to the Emperor for justice and the matter was given in the hands of Mir Jumla. Mir stated that the menses could not be taken as the only indicator of puberty and the claim of the Hindus was right, but now the zealots of the other side would hear nothing of it. The next day the Mohammadans gathered in a crowd of fifty to sixty thousand in the Jama Masjid and interrupted the prayer and matters came to a breaking point. To quell the hot tempers the Emperor had the girl imprisoned, and then killed, while the *qazi* and his men were subsequently transferred out; this was how the Emperor dealt with a delicate issue giving a hint of his future rule.

Muhammad Shah's rule is mainly remembered for its pusillanimous response to the Persian invasion of India under Nadir Shah. Nadir was the Persian monarch Shah Tahmasp's general and was responsible for delivering his country from the scourge of the Afghans, for which he was given half the kingdom, along with the important right to mint coins in his own name. Later the ineffectual Shah was deposed and his infant son put in his place, but four years later in 1736 when the child died, Nadir became the sole king of Persia.

Nadir Shah had sent an emissary to Delhi to inform the Emperor that an expedition against the Afghans of Qandahar would be undertaken and that he must seal his borders to prevent them from escaping into his territories. However Nadir's army found that there was nobody at the borders to stop the retreat of the Afghans. Later a courier sent by Nadir was forced to go back halfway, and was robbed and his guards were killed. These incidents were used as a reason by Nadir Shah to attack Hindustan in the end of 1738.

When the Persian army marched into Hindustan we find that the Indian army in the border regions was ill-equipped; their salary had not been paid for years, and the Delhi administration was least bothered about it. Nadir Shah faced no meaningful resistance during his march.

As Nadir's army came closer to Delhi, capturing province after province on the way, Muhammad Shah belatedly decided to fight against the Persians and started accumulating his troops. He even went to the extent of asking the Marathas under Baji Rao for help against the invader but no help came, so the Mughals were left on their own to face the Persians. The site chosen was Karnal where the Mughal army marched and entrenched itself. The battle of Karnal was fought in 1739 in which the Indians meekly surrendered after a tepid defence, where the swordsmanship and archery of the Hindustanis was pitted against the muskets of the Persians; the toll in human life on the Indian side was terrible. A great amount of loot fell into the hands of the Persians.

Nadir, at first, asked for an indemnity of 50 lakhs in his peace negotiations with the Nizam, who had lately joined the Emperor from Deccan, and who was also acting as the go-between between the two camps. But the lack of unity between the different nobles in Muhammad Shah's camp did its work here too. To foil the Nizam's negotiations Saadat Khan filled Nadir Shah's ears by saying that 50 lakhs was too small an amount and 20 crores was more in line, keeping in account the vast wealth of the Mughals.

So later Nadir increased the ransom value to 20 crores and arrested Muhammad Shah until it was paid. A few days later Nadir Shah, with the intention of extracting the war compensation, brought the Emperor back to Delhi, while his forces infested the city. Muhammad Shah let him lodge in his own chambers, and acted as Nadir's host to perfection, even going to the extent of placing his dinner before him. The earlier Mughals must have been turning in their graves seeing their descendant behave so abjectly in front of a conqueror but Muhammad Shah seemed more interested in having his life and crown spared. Later he gifted the accumulated treasures and jewels of his dynasty to Nadir. The *khutba* was read in Nadir's name and even coins were struck for a while in his name. He was in Delhi for two months and was the real seat of power for that duration.

However all was not well outside the palace gates. Nadir's troops were ambling about freely in the city streets, as the Delhi Emperor was at the mercy of their king. A rumour spread around the city that Nadir had been murdered when he was returning after visiting Muhammad Shah. Believing the rumour to be true the denizens of Delhi gained heart and gathered arms and attacked the Persian troops. As for the troops, when they heard of their ruler's assassination, the wind went out of their sails and they did not show a concerted resistance to these attacks. Thousands of Persians were killed by these rioters. When Nadir came to know of these developments he first ascertained the areas where the riots had taken place. Then he gave his troops a free hand to deal with the rioters in a severe way. What followed was a general massacre in the marked areas, and houses were ransacked, men were killed and women made slaves; multitudes committed suicide to escape defilement, while many others had to suffer outrages to their modesty. Then after a few hours of carnage he ordered his troops to withdraw. Later many men who were suspected of instigating the riots were arrested, and then beheaded at the Jumna's banks. There are many versions of this event and several different numbers given for those killed in the massacre but J. Sarkar finds the number of 20000 to be closest to actual fact.

In the following days the corpses of the victims rotted on the streets of Delhi, making the air unbreathable, but nobody dared organize a burial or cremation. Finally the *kotwal* took Nadir's permission to dispose of the bodies. But Nadir was not yet done; he inflicted another pain on the hapless people of Delhi by closing the granaries as well as the city gates. Thus a man-made famine was engineered, as the people could not even go out of the city to buy food. Those who tried had their noses and ears chopped off. Finally after he had brought the people of Delhi to their knees, he relented.

All through his stay in Delhi he never lost sight of his goal which was collecting the indemnity. He took off with a total loot of worth of about 15 crores of rupees, and other costly jewels and artifacts. The ornaments included all the crown jewels, and the famed Kohinoor diamond (this diamond again came back to India to Maharajah Ranjit Singh of the Punjab through Ahmed Shah Abdali's grandson Shah Shuja, only to be later taken away by the British from his son) and more importantly the jewelled Peacock Throne of the Mughals, which was itself worth a king's ransom. In addition it is estimated he took back with him 300 elephants, 10000 horses and an equal number of camels. But Nadir's lust for money would not stop even here; he also levied upon the rich of Delhi an amount of two crores. This was carried out by officials who would go to a person's house and assess the worth of his property, and fix the amount of compensation he would be required to pay. The amount was strictly exacted, even floors of houses were dug to look for buried treasure; families upon families were destroyed. Even somebody of the stature of *wazir* Qamaruddin was not spared. He was made to stand in

the sun till he coughed up one crore of rupees and jewels and elephants, while his *diwan* Majlis Rai's ear was cut off, causing him to commit suicide out of disgrace. Nadir was so impressed by the celebrated Nur Bai, who was a dancing girl and also Muhammad Shah's mistress, that he wanted to carry her off to Persia, and it is with great difficulty that she saved herself from the Shah's loving clutches.

In consequence of this raid on Hindustan the people of Persia were not taxed for three years.

Finally Nadir left, very graciously handing back the reins of Hindustan to the inept and profusely thankful Muhammad Shah, who gifted away to the Persians the areas lying to the west of the Indus, in the process further dismembering his already disintegrating empire. Nadir was heavily laden with the wealth of India he had acquired. He had also taken as captives hundreds of artisans, just like an earlier invader Timur, to build a city like Delhi in his native land. The slow progress of the convoy made it possible for the locals, noticeably the Sikhs and the Jats, to rob and loot the hind part of the train. The Persians lost many transport animals in this plunder, which even the mighty Nadir could not prevent. Thus the only consolation for the Indians from this bloody and costly invasion was that not all of the wealth reached Persia.

Muhammad Shah was not get any rest even in the final year of his life. Nadir Shah was assassinated by Ahmed Shah Abdali eight years after the sack of Delhi, who then became the ruler of Afghanistan. In 1747 he came to Hindustan in the footsteps of his predecessor to relieve the country of its fabled wealth. In his first attempt Abdali was stopped by the Mughals; this was the last time that the Mughals were able to successfully retaliate to the attacks of the Afghans. Thereafter Abdali made eight more attempts to conquer India till 1769; in fact, Afghan invasion became a common and regular event in the north of India, something like the annual flooding of the Nile.

After the death of Muhammad Shah it was the turn of his son Ahmed Shah Bahadur, born to Udham Bai or Qudsia Begum, a hindu danseuse whom the Emperor had fancied and later taken as his third queen, to ascend the throne. His six-year reign saw further erosion of Mughal rule; he was a young man in his early 20s when he became the ruler. As was expected from a royal of his age he was known to be more devoted to his *zenana* or harem, than to governing the country. His mother Qudsia and a eunuch Jawed Khan had great influence over him, and these two were the real rulers of the empire. It was during this time that Safdarjung was appointed the *wazir*; he was also the Nawab of Awadh and hence held the title of *Nawab-Wazir*. The Rohillas of Rohilkhand had been giving great trouble so Safdarjung took the help of the Marathas and the Jats to defeat the Rohillas, and promised the Marathas a part of the Rohilla territory and a part of the tax (called the *chauth*), but in the process also exposed to them the growing weakness of the empire. Meanwhile Ahmed Shah's irresolute ways made Ghaziuddin, the head of his army, with the title of Imad-ul-Mulk, suspect the king of perfidious behavior. Ahmed Shah's rule ended when he was blinded and jailed by his nobles under Ghaziuddin's leadership in the Salimgarh fort. He remained imprisoned till he died a natural death in 1775. Ghaziuddin stepped up as the next *wazir*.

In his place Jahandar Shah's son Alamgir II, already in his mid-fifties, was made the emperor of a nominal Mughal empire. He was a pious man devoted to religion, whose ineffectual rule lasted five years till 1759, during which the *wazir* Ghazi-uddin Khan held the real reins of power.

In 'The Fall of the Moghul Empire of Hindustan' H.G. Keene says that by this time Bengal, Bihar and even Orissa were largely lost to the Mughals. Gujarat too was under the sway of the Marathas, while the Rohillas were dominant in Rohilkhand.

In 1757 Ahmed Shah Abdali again invaded India, and this time he and his army entered Delhi and occupied it for two months, and gave the denizens of Delhi a more difficult time than his predecessor Nadir Shah twenty years back. He also married his son Timur Shah to the daughter of the crown-prince Ali Gauhar.

The devout Emperor met his end in a gruesome manner. He is said to have gone to Firozshah Kotla Fort to meet a holy man. Here, next to the Jami Masjid, he was murdered by beheading, most probably on the orders of the *wazir*. This event happened in the November of 1759. After the murder Ghaziuddin tried to place on the throne a puppet by the name of Shah Jahan II, but the prince Ali Gauhar, who had earlier escaped confinement by the *wazir*, also proclaimed himself emperor and it is he that prevailed and came to the throne under the name Shah Alam II. Abdali then moved against Ghaziuddin and when the *wazir* realized that his time was up he

fled from the scene of Delhi. Abdali again captured and looted Delhi, followed by the Marathas who occupied Delhi in December of 1759. The Red fort was further degraded when the silver ceiling of the Diwan-e-Khas was removed and melted, yielding 17 lakhs of rupees of that time.

Shah Alam II's reign proved to be a long-lasting one and lasted till the year 1806. But it also saw the rise of another power from a far away land, the British. After winning the battle of Plassey with the help of Mir Jaffer in 1757, they went on to win another important campaign which was the battle of Buxar in 1764. This gave them the Diwani rights over a large area in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and effectively made them masters of this big territory. The Emperor became the pensioner of the Britishers. It also gave them a strong start to their ultimate conquest of the entire sub-continent. In 1799 the battle fought between the British and Tipu Sultan, in which Tipu was killed, gave the British control over the kingdom of Mysore. Meanwhile the Sikhs and especially the Marathas continued growing in power.

The Marathas had become all-powerful in the central part of India, and this brought them in conflict with Abdali. In 1760-61 the third battle of Panipat was fought between Abdali, the Rohillas (under Najib-ud-Daulah) and Shuja-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Awadh and the son of Safdarjung, on one side, and the combined force of the Marathas on the other side. The Maratha power was thoroughly trounced by the Abdali faction, and only helped to enhance Abdali's grip over Hindustan. As already mentioned, before the skirmish the Marathas had easily taken possession of the capital from the weak force guarding it. But after the battle Abdali's favoured man, Najib-ud-Daulah the Rohilla, was made in-charge of the affairs, and he governed Delhi sagaciously till his death.

Meanwhile the escaped Shah Alam made a feeble attempt to establish himself in Patna but was thwarted by the British and Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah of Awadh, and so finally he came to an understanding with the British. Accordingly Shah Alam went and lived in comfort and luxury in the *subah* of Allahabad which was allotted to him as a stipend, after having been pensioned off by the British, following the battle of Buxar (Curiously enough, even though the Emperor was just a nominal ruler of Hindustan now, the name of the Timurid House still commanded respect. The satraps who had now become effectively independent rulers were still not inclined towards proclaiming their independence. Even the *firman*s were issued in the name of the Emperor. As an example, the *firman* giving the *Diwani* rights of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company was issued in the name of Shah Alam). The Mughals had indeed fallen a long way down since the days of Emperor Aurangzeb.

In 1771 the Marathas again invaded the capital. Though Shah Alam had been settled comfortably in Allahabad for years he was longing to be considered the ruler of Delhi since in the Indian mind the king of Delhi was the real king of Hindustan. Thus he entered into negotiations with the Marathas and as a result they restored Shah Alam on the Delhi throne, against the wishes of the British, for the first time after he had assumed the title of monarch. What the Emperor was made to pay for to the Marathas for this help is not clearly known, except that he was made to pay 10 lakhs of rupees in cash. But now, after leaving Allahabad, Shah Alam was reduced to being a king without much of a kingdom.

In another decade or so, while the Maratha star was on the rise, the Scindia, acting as the Peshwa's deputy, came to directly manage the provinces of Delhi and Agra; the King was allotted a monthly stipend while a Maratha garrison occupied the Red fort rendering the Emperor a puppet their hands.

During Shah Alam's dismal rule a period that stands out is the miserable year of 1788. This was the time when Ghulam Qadir the Rohilla chief and Najib-ud-Daulah's grandson, and believed to be a former *haram* page of the Emperor, with his forces occupied the city for three months, and the Red fort for a month and a half. The Emperor was at the mercy of this Rohilla and he began maltreating the Emperor. Qadir accused the Emperor of having surreptitiously asked the Scindia for help against him and using this as a pretext put him under house arrest. The Emperor was ordered to vacate his throne and another Mughal prince, a son of Emperor Ahmad Shah, was brought out of Salimgarh jail and was enthroned under the title of Bedar Bakht.

Once he had plundered Shah Alam and his royal family of their jewels, the idea took hold of Ghulam Qadir's mind that the deposed Emperor was in possession of knowledge of a treasure hidden probably inside the Red fort. Thus followed the bodily torture of Shah Alam and the royal women. The widows of the former Emperors



were also looted, dealt with harshly and thrown out of the palace. Qadir's baseness saw him sitting on the throne with Bedar Bakht or even abusing him. The throne was not spared either; its gold plating was melted to extract even the last ounces of Mughal wealth.

At last came the fateful day. Qadir summoned the dethroned Emperor to the Diwan-e-Khas and once again asked for the whereabouts of the imagined treasure. On Shah Alam's professed ignorance of knowing about any treasure, Qadir jumped at him and with his dagger gouged out his victim's eye; thus came about at the hands of a commoner the blinding of the Emperor of India, the Emperor whose dynasty had controlled almost the entire sub-continent just about eighty years ago. Upon being asked by his assailant whether he saw anything the Emperor is supposed to have retorted "Nothing but the Koran between you and me". The shabby treatment of the royals did not stop; the members of the household were made to dance for the pleasure of Qadir and his Pathans.

Finally on the approach of the Maratha army Qadir escaped from Delhi and was holed up in the Meerut fort where he was besieged. After a long siege he escaped in the middle of the night from the fort at Meerut only to be caught and brought to Mathura, where the Scindia meted out harsh punishment to him. He was paraded on a donkey and his tongue, eyes, nose, ears, hand and feet were mutilated, and thereafter he was hanged upon a tree. Shah Alam was reinstated as the emperor by Scindia in spite of his blindness and the poor, hapless Bedar Bakht was sent back to Salimgarh fort jail, and was later dispatched. The above extract, taken from Keene's "The fall of the Moghal Empire of Hindustan" does not mention any alliance between Qadir and the Sikhs during the period he occupied Delhi. However it does mention that after his death his family fled to the Punjab. On the other hand Khushwant Singh states that Qadir was able to enter Delhi with the help of the Sikhs, who later broke their alliance with him after he committed the egregious act of blinding the Emperor. Even though the Emperor was re-seated on his throne, the actual governance was retained in the hands of the Marathas under Scindia. In later years Shah Alam was reduced to such want of resources that he could not even maintain the semblance of majesty at his court.

Meanwhile conditions in India were changing fast. In 1802 the treaty of Bassein made the Peshwa Baji Rao II a client of the British. In Keene's words the treaty "tended to substitute the British as the paramount power in Hindustan, and "shut Scindia out from the grand object of his ambition, namely, to rule the Mahratta Empire in the name of the Peshwa."

This treaty not just made the British the caretakers of the Maratha empire, but also shut the door at the face of the French, since one of the clauses of the treaty was that the Marathas would henceforth deal only with the British.

Soon after, in 1803, a battle was fought between Scindia and the British forces under Lord Lake in which the British were victorious. Lord Lake entered Delhi and was eagerly received by the blind Emperor. The victors decided that the Emperor was to continue on the throne and even coins struck in his name while the real power behind the crown had now passed on from the Marathas to the English. The Emperor had held sway only over Delhi and some surrounding area, but that nominal power also was to be moderated by a British Resident. The Emperor was to receive the proceeds from his domains and a monthly stipend of 90,000 rupees.

After Shah Alam's death his son Akbar Shah II became the next king and remained on the throne till his death in 1837. During his reign in 1818 the third Anglo-Maratha war was fought which was won by the British. This resulted in most of the territory of the Peshwa and Bhonsale being annexed by the British; Scindia was sagacious enough to remain neutral. By the end of Akbar Shah II's rule there were only two major powers ruling Hindustan; they were the Sikhs controlling most of the north upto Sutlej under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the British, who controlled a majority of the remaining territory. Thereafter his son, the unfortunate Bahadur Shah Zafar was crowned and was the last Mughal Emperor, reigning until the Uprising of 1857.

During the tumultuous downward spiral of a decaying empire not many splendid buildings were erected by the Mughal royals, nor did the Mughals after Muhammad Shah have the means for sumptuous architecture. The best example of a majestic building of this period is probably the Safdarjung tomb built in 1753-54 by

Safdarjung's son Shuja-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Awadh. In fact it is a sign of its time when a Nawab could choose to have a garden tomb built while the Emperor would not. I decided on an almost perfect, biting-cold, cloudy December day to visit the tomb, which lies close to Lodi Garden.

The entrance to the premises was a beautiful three-storey gate with a central recessed arch covering the lower two storeys; it recessed into the main arched *darwaza* on the ground storey and a *jharokha* in the upper storey. This central arch had a gorgeous roof with mosaic pattern, each triangular tile of the mosaic having flower patterns on it, extending down to the sides of the *jharokha*. The uppermost storey was a simpler, balustraded, viewing balcony with three arches. To the right side of the gate was, of course, the mandatory mosque, a small triple-domed structure built with the same motif as the main building containing the tomb. The tomb grounds housed the main building with the tomb at its centre, surrounded by a sprawling garden built in the Char Bagh pattern, again illustrating the Mughal penchant for symmetry. The entire garden area was quartered into four lawns, and in between these four quarters were the flowing water channels and fountains. These quarter lawns were further divided into smaller ones, with walkways woven around them. A long walk along a water channel took me to the main edifice, which stood on a platform, with many cells below it, and a colonnaded walkway at the periphery. This tomb building was a double-storey square structure, pretty much symmetrical on all the sides, with a huge bulbous dome, almost like an onion dome, crowning it. The two-storey recessed arch or *ivan* at each of the four faces recessed into a smaller, arched ingress at the lower storey and a *jharokha* on the upper storey. On both sides of the central arch and on both storeys were galleries, mostly topped with a flower pattern in relief. One could see the use of red and primarily buff colour sandstone on the façade, punctuated by white marble on the sides of the arch, with the dome being made entirely of white marble.

At the corners were minarets with viewing balconies at every storey with a *chhatri* decorating the top of each minaret. Just above the central arch could be seen the recurring theme of an array of *chhatris* laid side by side, flanked by two taller ones. In front of the main entrance, by the sides, there were two small receptacles embedded in the platform which must have been filled with water in the past. The plinth, made of red sandstone, had a low parapet at the edges, forming a delicate *jaali* at places, while at others it was a simple red slab. At the corners of the platform were octagonal areas, probably so designed, so that a viewer standing there could take in a good view of the spectacular gardens around. The tomb seemed to be designed in the form of a pleasure garden, complete with various pavilions at the periphery. These pavilions, which had been used as chambers of residence, were the Badshah Pasand, the Jangli Mahal and the Moti Mahal. Inside the tomb, there was a ring of eight chambers, surrounding the inner central chamber which was a sweep of white, with a matching marble cenotaph in the middle. It was more heavily carved than any other Mughal tombstone I had seen in Delhi.

Safdarjung tomb would very impressive to the first-time visitor, especially if seen before the Humayun tomb. But one would feel that the building had a problem with its proportion. It seemed a little too tall, as if a giant had pulled it up by the finial of its dome. The novelty in the architecture was provided by the onion dome which is not seen in the other big tombs. The marble and red sandstone used for the construction of the tomb is said to have been stripped from the tomb of Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, a *navratna* at the court of Emperor Akbar, and the author of the famed couplets 'Rahim Ka Doha'.

## The Uprising of 1857 and After

'First War of Independence' or 'Sepoy Mutiny'? Even a century and a half later this question has not been decided conclusively. One set of historians would like to call it a pan-India revolt, the other side would point out that it was concentrated mainly around the northern part of India, extending to some parts of Bengal. One party would assert that both the Hindus and the Muslims fought together against the British occupation, the other group would rebut the claim saying it was just a coincidence that their independent grievances brought both the groups together.

But there is no gainsaying that the revolt gave the British occupying forces a mighty scare. It even resulted in the East India Company having to relinquish control over India in 1858 to Queen Victoria, the British monarch of the time. So what started this revolt, which has become a part of Indian folklore, a rebellion which became a rallying point for future rebellions, an inspiration for later revolutionaries?

After winning Bengal with the help of Mir Jaffer through the battle of Plassey, and acquiring the *Diwanee* the English set out to exploit it to the hilt. Their policies were constructed so as to maximize the profits they would accrue in order to pay the large army they commanded as well as to pay handsome dividends to their shareholders back home. One such experiment was to give the right to collect revenue to the highest bidder; such a policy naturally brought ruin upon the farmers and those dependent on agriculture. The wealth thus amassed by the English from their colonies is said to be instrumental in starting the Industrial Revolution in Britain. This in turn brought more grief to India as Britain set about using India as the market for its finished cloth and goods. The Indian weavers lost the race to these cheaper mass-produced goods and a bulk of them had to return to subsistence on agriculture. Since there was not enough land to support them many of them languished jobless. Thus Lord Bentinck was forced to admit that the plains of India were bleached with the bones of its cotton weavers. These systematic policies of the British to ruin Indian industry had built up a deep resentment among the native farmers and artisans. The upper classes, on the other hand, were unhappy because the natives had been barred from holding the highest positions in the land.

By design the British also ruined the landed gentry. A number of the landed aristocrats or *taluqdars*, performing the function of revenue collection, lost the estates under them as the new government started treating them as little more than middlemen, and for them, other than affecting their income and power, this was a big come-down in life. This class quietly nursed its grievance against the *firangis*.

Then there was the ever-present religious factor. Earlier the British had banned the inhuman practice of *sati* in the provinces under their control. In 1856 the Hindu Widow Remarriage act was promulgated which tried to ameliorate the condition of widows. These good acts of the colonizers were also seen as interference in religion by the orthodox upper-caste priests of the time who were insecure of losing control of the masses; these Hindu priests were already chary of the increased missionary activity undertaken by the Christian missionaries.

A prime reason that brought a disgruntled ruling class to support the revolt was the perverted doctrine of lapse and annexation of princely states. Thereby the Company would annex a vassal state which did not have a natural heir. Neither was an adopted child recognized as a legitimate heir. The other clause that the Company could invoke to annex a vassal state was if it found the current ruler to be incompetent. The Company swiftly and efficiently used these pretexts to take over administration of states like Satara, Nagpur, Jhansi, Sambhalpur, Karauli and others. Thus rebellion leaders like Nana Sahib, who was the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II, and Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi were born.

The annexation of Awadh in 1856, when Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was deposed, also contributed significantly to the Uprising. The dismissed Nawab's 60000 strong army was disbanded (though a portion of these were taken into employment by the British), and this led to large-scale unemployment. In addition, the local economy which depended on the royal court for subsistence was also broken. The erstwhile Nawab's wife Begum Hazrat Mahal joined the leadership of the revolt to retrieve the lost kingdom.

The rumour was prevalent, not without a hint of reason, that the British were conniving to destroy the caste of the Hindus and convert them to Christianity. One of the reasons for this was that the British had started the

mess system in the prisons where the inmates were divided into groups according to their castes, but the people feared that the cook preparing the food might happen to be from a lower caste. Similarly the Muslims were haunted by a rumour that the government was going to prohibit circumcision and force Muslim women to travel abroad without a veil.

Then there is the curious case of the chapatti scheme. Malleon in his book "Indian Mutiny of 1857" says that there was no dearth of conspirators who were waiting to pour oil on troubled waters. One such chief conspirator was the 'Maulvi' Ahmadullah who played a big role during the Uprising, and it was he who devised this scheme. His idea was that when the discontent had crossed a threshold, chapattis would be circulated among the villages to indicate that a big revolution was on the way and this would rouse the people en masse. Chapattis were chosen since they were easy to make and distribute and would cause no suspicion.

Against this backdrop of simmering discontent and underhanded scheming against foreign rule, the last nail in the coffin was driven in the fateful year of 1857. The Company had introduced the new Enfield rifles to supplant the Brown Bess, and their cartridges, the ends of which had to be bitten off, were greased with pork or beef fat. Pork is unholy to the Muslims and the cow is holy to the Hindus. This news spread like wildfire among the sepoys. The belief, which was already in the air, now spread among them that this was done to convert them to Christianity by first making them lose their caste; the British officers tried to disabuse them of this superstition but to no avail.

Finally on 29<sup>th</sup> March in Barrackpore cantonment, 25 km north of Kolkata, Mangal Pandey attacked the adjutant Lt. Baugh, first by firing at him and then with a sword. General John Hearsey's order to arrest Mangal met with reluctance on the part of the regiment. Mangal Pandey, meanwhile, tried to kill himself with his musket but failed. He was subsequently arrested and hanged on 8<sup>th</sup> April and the entire regiment was dismissed on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May. This was the first important episode of what was to become the rebellion. At Meerut also there was tension in the air; the rumour was going strong that the flour sold in the market had been mixed with the bones of bullock. 85 sepoys refused to use the cartridges issued to them and so were arrested and court marshaled and sentenced to imprisonment. Their comrades saw them as 'martyrs for their faith' and their own inactivity became a taunt to them. In addition it is said that they were even jeered by the prostitutes of the area as traitors to their faith. This piqued the already bruised Indian ego and the infantry as the cavalry troops in Meerut started attacking the British. The native troops caused a bloodbath where men, women and innocent children were slaughtered alike and many European houses were burned. During the carnage the soldiers released the 85 sepoys from jail and later they marched to Delhi; thus the scene of action shifted to the Mughal capital.

Upon arriving in Delhi on 11<sup>th</sup> May, the rebels were admitted by the native guard guarding the Red fort, and they killed every Englishman they came across. They took control of the fort and proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar as their leader (Some points to be noted are that the Mughals had slid further since the time of Shah Alam. Until 1835 the coins were minted in the name of the Delhi King, but this practice was stopped. The British custom of paying tribute to his successor was also ended in 1843 by Lord Ellenborough. Later the office of the Governor-General had decided that after Bahadur Shah the succeeding prince must give up the title of king. Thus the Mughal rule would formally end in India. It was thought by the British that the emotional appeal that the Mughals held in the mind of the natives had weakened and there would be not much distress at the end of the rule, but they were pretty wrong. In fact this was also one thought that must have convinced Bahadur Shah to take up one last effort to save the House of Timur from extinction). However the octogenarian Emperor was again reduced to being a nominal monarch while the rebels took charge of the proceedings. In the 'Indian Mutiny of 1857' Malleon says that the rebels had converted the Diwan-i-Am into a barrack. Even outside the King's palace the rebels were on a rampage. The Delhi Bank, the Delhi Gazette press and the English church were mercilessly attacked, as slowly even the native troops stationed in Delhi joined the revolt.

I went out to search if Delhi still had preserved the marks of this struggle; I found plenty of them. My first stop was the Kashmere gate area. On 11<sup>th</sup> May 1857, when rebels from Meerut arrived and started attacking, the riot spread all over town. The Delhi Magazine or the arsenal which was at Kashmere gate was protected by the

officers for a few hours in the hope that by that time the British regiments from Meerut, in pursuit of the mutineers, would arrive in Delhi. After some time the natives working in the magazine climbed out of the magazine and deserted to the side of the rebels. When the English sensed that it was no longer possible to keep the rebels at bay, the magazine was blown up to prevent the ammunition from falling in the hands of the enemy. This was a huge explosion in which hundreds of Indians died, while some of the British manning the magazine too perished. The magazine was partially destroyed, but still there was much useful material in it for the rebels. The two gates of the magazine still stand in the middle of the road, some distance away from St. James Church. The gates are non-descript, pink structures. Most people pass by without noticing them or the events they witnessed.

The terrified Europeans fled from Delhi to the northern Ridge, or what is called today as the Kamla Nehru Ridge. The women and children gathered at the highest point of the Ridge, the Flagstaff Tower, in the torturing May heat before fleeing to Karnal, Meerut or Ambala. An eye-witness describes the pitiful scene of 11<sup>th</sup> May 1857 of the grief-stricken English huddled together at the Flagstaff Tower and calls it a black hole.

In fact the British camp during the siege of Delhi was close to the Ridge since in those days there were just a few shrubby plants all around. The area was later afforested and today, the Flagstaff Tower is a clearing in the midst of the Ridge forest. I could see groups of people sitting on the benches laid out around the Tower, warming themselves in the early December sun. The Tower is an octagonal, almost round, no-frills structure sporting crosses on all the sides. Looking at it the thought that crossed my mind was that it was built by the very hands that built the magazine gates. They look like structures out of the same mould.

J. W. Kaye in his iconic work on the Uprising narrates that those Europeans who were left behind in Delhi on that May day, around fifty in number, were confined in an underground compartment. Though they were made to live in miserable conditions, their spirit was unbroken. When one of the ladies was asked how the British would treat the Indians if they came back to power her reply was "Just as you have treated our husbands and children". After a few days in captivity they were taken out together in front of a huge crowd and massacred and their bodies thrown in the Jumna.

But the British would not give up the prize of Hindustan so willingly to the natives. The return of Delhi into British hands began with the famous battle of Badli-ki-Sarai on 8<sup>th</sup> June. This area was six miles north of Delhi and had 'old houses and walled gardens' which had been the country houses of the nobles of Delhi. The rebels had taken their position there since the walls provided them with ready-made defences to give an effective challenge to the British. Malleson mentions that at the time Delhi's defences were regarded to have been traditionally weak since it had historically offered almost no resistance to its attackers. It had been foolishly expected by the top British officials that when the British army marched into Delhi the city would automatically open its gates and surrender to them. The rebels proved this notion wrong by offering a stout defence on that day. But after resisting for a considerable period they were forced to retreat into the city. As mentioned, the British then took position in the Ridge overlooking Delhi as the position from which to meditate their attacks. From here began the three-and-a-half month long siege of Delhi.

The native press was issued a gag order by the Governor-General Lord Canning since the British felt it was preaching sedition, but interestingly even the English press was suppressed which was critical of the government's moves.

The entire country between the Jumna and Ganga had revolted, while Bundelkhand and Rohilkhand were teeming with rebels, and there were uprisings in Awadh; Central India was going out of grasp.

At the other erstwhile capital Agra things were not much better for the British; the English survivors of the mutiny at Gwalior had found refuge there. In the beginning of July it was decided to round up every Englishman and Englishwoman and take shelter in the Agra fort of the Mughals. They were allowed to take just the bare essentials for survival. Inside the fort there were natives also; these were Karauli matchlockmen, and soldiers from Bharatpur and Kota. These contingents were disarmed and they left the scene, some joining the rebels they were supposed to fight. Even the prisoners were released and taken across the Jumna, to prevent the possibility of rebels forcing into the fort and letting these men loose. Finally, the pontoon bridge connecting to the fort was demolished. These somewhat drastic measures show the urgency with which the English acted.

The British in Agra had to remain cooped up in the fort and would be relieved months later in October, after the fall of Delhi.

Delhi now came to be regarded by the British as the acid test. It became necessary to recapture Delhi to break the morale of the natives, thereby quelling the rebelling populace.

Going back to the fort in Delhi, it had been strengthened by the British considerably in the preceding years. There was a ditch around the twenty-four feet high walls. It was twenty-five feet in breadth and almost twenty feet in depth. The place had been garrisoned with 40000 troops who had been trained in discipline by the British and had 114 pieces of heavy artillery at their disposal along with the ammunition in the Delhi magazine. On the other side were the British besiegers with 3000 British soldiers, a battalion of Gurkhas, the Punjab Guide corps and some natives, besides 22 field guns. Thus it was decided by General Barnard, who was commanding the siege of Delhi from the Ridge, against attacking the city until reinforcements arrived. The one advantage that the British had was that their position on the Ridge was 50 to 60 feet above the level of the plain of the city. The nearby Hindu Rao House was vacant and was occupied by the British, while the Flagstaff Tower served as a vantage point. The Chauburji Masjid between these two buildings was also used along with the nearby structure called Pir Ghaib.

Kaye describes the area lying between the British and the rebels in some detail. Beyond the Hindu Rao House was the Subzi Mandi area, and between this and the Kabul Gate of the city were the villages of Kishanganj, Trevelyanj, Paharipur, close to the city, which could be used by the rebels as hiding places. Near the Kashmere gate were the leafy environs of the Metcalfe House, and further on, the spacious Qudsia Bagh and mansion, and the building of Ludlow Castle, whose inhabitant Simon Fraser, had been murdered during the seizure of Delhi in May.

As I walked down south from the Flagstaff Tower through the Ridge I came to the derelict Chauburji Masjid which was also in ruins, and bore marks of the battle. On going further south still I came to the Hindu Rao Hospital where Hindu Rao's house once stood. In fact the hospital stands as an extension of the old building. Next to it was the strange looking building called Pir Ghaib, and a *baoli* nearby. Pir Ghaib was built by Firoz Shah Tughlaq during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, maybe as a part of his hunting lodge Kushk-i-Shikar; some even say it was an observatory. During the battle for Delhi it is known to have suffered from the barrage of the Indians. A part of its façade was shattered at the time. The building was pinkish in colour and had the slightly tapering edges in front showing its Tughlaqian origins. On the backside there were two parallel flights of stairs, unusually steep. Each staircase ran up to the roof of the first storey and after a small break it ran up again to the top of the building. Even at the front there was a staircase reaching up to the second storey. Here there were two rooms, with a solitary lamp kept burning in each room to honour a saint. This saint is said to have used the room for his *chilla* which is the 40-day period of seclusion and praying. A stone inscription by ASI mentioned that there was a cenotaph of the saint which disappeared suddenly one day, and so the place is called Pir Ghaib or 'The saint has disappeared'. On climbing one of the staircases at the backside I reached the roof of the building and saw a cylindrical structure jutting out. This cylinder was at the periphery of a hole in the roof which went through to the ground; maybe this was, I felt, an observatory after all.

In front of the gate of Hindu Rao hospital gate there was another Ashoka pillar similar to the one at Kotla Firoz Shah. This pillar was brought from Meerut by Firoz Shah Tughlaq and was set up in the Kush-i-Shikar Palace in 1356. The pillar was broken into five pieces due to an explosion in the powder magazine in Farrukhsiyar's time in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The broken pieces were joined together and the pillar was erected at its present place by the British government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

On going further on I came to the beautiful Mutiny Memorial built in 1863 to commemorate solely those killed or wounded (and even those killed by disease) on the British side, Europeans as well as natives, while taking Delhi back from the rebels during the Uprising. It was a gorgeous Victorian-style tower built on a high platform, octagonal in shape and made of red sandstone. It tapered up at a very steep angle, reminding me of a church steeple, and there was a white marble spire at the top with the sign of the cross.

On its sides there were marble tablets showing the numbers of those killed and wounded in the battle and also a list of those regiments which fought at Delhi. Then there were also smaller tablets showing individual names of important personnel killed, with names like John Nicholson, Salkeld, etc. and no Indian names. Then there

was a plaque showing the list of skirmishes that took place in the Delhi region from 30<sup>th</sup> May to 20<sup>th</sup> September 1857. It read as follows:

Battle for the Hindun	May 30 <sup>th</sup>
D <sup>0</sup> Chazeeoodeenugur	May 31 <sup>st</sup>
D <sup>0</sup> Badlee Serai	June 8 <sup>th</sup>
Affairs at Hindoo Rao's	June 9 <sup>th</sup>
D <sup>0</sup> D <sup>0</sup>	June 10 <sup>th</sup>
D <sup>0</sup> D <sup>0</sup>	June 11 <sup>th</sup>
Attacks on the Flagstaff Tower and Subzee Mundee	June 12 <sup>th</sup>
Attack on Metcalfe picquet	June 13 <sup>th</sup>
Action of Kissengunge	June 17 <sup>th</sup>
Attacks on the British camp	June 19 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup>
Action of the Subzee Mundee	June 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Attack on D <sup>0</sup>	June 27 <sup>th</sup>
D <sup>0</sup> D <sup>0</sup>	June 30 <sup>th</sup>
Action of Alipore	July 4 <sup>th</sup>
Attack on British camp	July 9 <sup>th</sup>
Actions of the Subzee Mundi	July 14 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup>
Action of Trevelyan Gunge	July 20 <sup>th</sup>
Action of Metcalfe House	July 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Action of Kissengunge	August 1 <sup>st</sup>
Action of Koodsea Bagh	August 12 <sup>th</sup>
Battle of Nujufgurh	August 25 <sup>th</sup>

#### THE SIEGE

N <sup>o</sup> 1 Battery made and armed	September 7 <sup>th</sup>
N <sup>o</sup> 2 Breaching battery made and armed	September 8 <sup>th</sup> 9 <sup>th</sup> 10 <sup>th</sup>
N <sup>o</sup> 3 Breaching battery made and armed	September 10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup>
N <sup>o</sup> 4 Mortar battery D <sup>0</sup> D <sup>0</sup>	
N <sup>o</sup> 5 Mortar battery D <sup>0</sup> D <sup>0</sup>	
Breaching and bombardment	September 11 <sup>th</sup> 12 <sup>th</sup> & 13 <sup>th</sup>

#### STORMING OF DELHI

Capture of the magazine	September 14 <sup>th</sup>
Capture of the palace	September 16 <sup>th</sup>
City finally evacuated by the enemy	September 19 <sup>th</sup>
	September 20 <sup>th</sup>

In this plaque the British government regrettably called the rebels as 'enemy'.

In 1972, on completing twenty-five years of independence the Indian side belatedly got an acknowledgement. The monument was renamed as Ajitgarh and another plaque was installed which told the Indian story in Hindi, Urdu, English and Punjabi. The words on this plaque were "The enemy of the inscriptions on this monument were those who rose against colonial rule and fought bravely for national liberation in 1857.

In memory of the heroism of these immortal martyrs for Indian freedom, this plaque was unveiled on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nation's attainment of freedom."

From their respective positions the rebels and the British besiegers attacked each other and defended themselves. Over time some of the Indians fighting for the British went over to the Indian side. Then, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June fell the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Plassey. There was a belief doing the rounds among the Indians that the British rule in India would last exactly a hundred years, not a day more, not a day less. The

rebels did their best to fulfil this prophecy. But luck was not on their side. The British had received a fresh boost with around 850 men joining their ranks. They were able to repulse the fierce attack of the rebels for the day and at nightfall the ardour of the Indians flagged.

As June turned to July the British found that their artillery supply was diminishing while the rebels had the entire Delhi magazine at their disposal. Meanwhile the commander General Barnard had died of cholera and was succeeded by General Reed. Among the British party there was the growing view that an assault on Delhi was a better option than laying a long siege; there was a greater chance of success there. However the decision to attack Delhi was again deferred.

Meanwhile on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July the rebels attacked again at the Sabzi Mandi area and were driven back with the loss of 223 men to the British party. On the 14<sup>th</sup> another attack on the Hindu Rao House lasted the whole day and there were many men lost, and another attack on Sabzi Mandi ensued. This area was turning out to be a favourite of the rebels due to the houses and walled gardens providing protection to the Indians and so the British cleared it all away. From then onwards there were no more attacks there. Meanwhile, in the middle of July General Reed, citing health reasons, had resigned from his post and left for the Himalayas. The next commander of the force was Brigadier Archdale Wilson.

Then on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August John Nicholson arrived in Delhi and a week later his troops followed. On the 25<sup>th</sup> he battled the rebels who had gone out from Delhi to intercept a siege-train which was coming to the British aid from Firozpur. He defeated them convincingly, and killed 800 of them, and captured 13 guns. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September the siege-train, consisting of 'siege guns pulled by elephants and numerous carts of ammunition', arrived and replenished the dwindled stocks of the British.

Finally the English came to a hesitant decision to launch an assault on Delhi on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> of September. It was felt that waiting for more reinforcements to arrive might go against them since the Punjab was hanging in balance without any European troops there. If the Punjabis revolted the problems of the British would be multiplied manyfold.

Malleson writes that the defences of Delhi consisted of the natural barrier created by the Jumna to the east of the city, and elsewhere there was a series of bastions at intervals, connected by a wall with holes for gunners. The British plan was to carry an attack on the Mori, Kashmir bastions and the Water bastion. On the evening at the appointed time the engineers got to work on setting up batteries to pound the city during the attack. For the first battery guns were mounted around 700 yards from the Mori bastion; this battery was intended to silence the Mori and Kashmir bastions. On the next morning when the rebels discovered what was going on they sent out the infantry and cavalry from Lahore Gate but the fire from this battery kept them at bay. The battery also succeeded in its task of keeping the Mori and Kashmir bastions relatively quiet. The second battery was set up in front of Ludlow Castle and was meant to barrage the Kashmir bastion and also to blast an opening so that the city could be entered. The third battery was within 160 yards of the Water bastion, while a fourth mortar battery was set up in the Qudsia Bagh. The Indians, in turn, mounted their heavy guns between the bastions and light guns elsewhere. They also built a trench which was lined with their infantry. All the British batteries were installed by the 11<sup>th</sup> and firing started from both sides. By the afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup> two adequate breaches were made in the city walls and it was decided by the British side to storm the city.

There were four British columns and a fifth reserve column (to help the first column) drawn up with a strength exceeding 5000 men for the upcoming assault; the first and second columns to force into the breaches near the Kashmir bastion and the Water bastion, the third column to attack the Kashmir Gate after it had been blown open and the fourth column to clear the suburbs of Paharanpur and Kishanganj from its post at Hindu Rao's house and enter the Lahore Gate.

On 14<sup>th</sup> September, the day of the assault, the first and second columns were successful in entering the breaches in the walls near the Kashmir bastion and the Water bastion respectively, and repelling the rebels. The second column was even able to wrest back control of Kabul Gate. The third column's advance party carried twenty-five pounds of gunpowder audaciously to the Kashmir Gate while constantly being in the line of fire of the Indians and exploded the Gate, in the process losing some of their key men. The third column promptly entered the city and reached the Chandni Chowk, and from there they went to the Jama Masjid. However the fourth column was not so fortunate as to meet success as easily as the other columns. This



column at Subzi Mandi needed four heavy artillery guns but the guns arrived late and without sufficient gunners to operate them. Besides 500 of the troops sent to create a diversion by occupying the Idgah were now occupied in fighting. The column crept on without the guns and had gained control over the bridge across the canal. Now, Reid, who was heading the column, was knocked senseless due to a musket ball hitting him on the head. He gave the command to Captain Lawrence but the disorder which had reigned till then meant that the column retreated to the batteries behind Hindu Rao's house. Thus the assault of the fourth column failed. John Nicholson, the man of the moment, was commanding the first column. He took his men and ran towards the Lahore Gate. Once John Nicholson passed the Kabul Gate (at this point it was held by the second British column) on his way to the Lahore Gate, he had expected the support of the fourth column. But due to the failure of the fourth column the task now became perilous. To reach the Lahore Gate Nicholson had to negotiate through a long lane full of sharpshooters, with two brass guns at the end. At that end was also the Lahore Gate bastion with heavy arms and capable of holding a thousand men. But regardless of danger Nicholson and his team darted from the Kabul gate under constant barrage of grape and musket-fire and stones and with much difficulty reached the two guns. While making this bold charge the other leaders of this assault party were shot, and the morale of their British soldiers started ebbing. An order from Nicholson to rally his disheartened troops filled the air, but the next moment he was struck by a bullet fatally. His team subsequently retired back to the Kabul Gate along with him.

The third column which had reached the gates of the Jama Masjid could not get on without artillery and withdrew to Begum Bagh and then further to the church nearby, where the night was spent.

The reserve column had followed the third column through the Kashmir Gate and landed in the college nearby, and occupied it along with Skinner's house, as well as the important Kashmir Gate and the Water bastion.

The British had gained considerable access between the Water bastion and the Kabul Gate at the end of the first day's operations.

Seeing the skirmish the people of the city had started leaving with the valuables they could carry, and burying some for later retrieval. In Kaye's narrative the people left behind a very important, precious object, and that was liquor, and Kaye believes it was done deliberately by the natives when he says "with the subtlety of their race [the Indians] had purposely left the immense supplies of intoxicating liquors, stored in the city, open to the hand of the spoiler". The British troops who had gained entry into the city fell upon it like maddened animals. This would make it impossible to gain the city, and so it was decided by the high command, that is by General Wilson, that the entire store of liquor be destroyed. Most of it was thus emptied on the streets of Delhi.

The day of the 15<sup>th</sup> of September began and the British columns inside the city prepared for shelling the city. By now the rebels were losing their nerve. They evacuated Kishanganj in the early hours of the 16<sup>th</sup> where two days earlier they had valiantly fought and held the fourth column. Meanwhile the British again captured the magazine, so important to their success; it was still replete with ammunition. Then began the slow task of regaining control over different parts of the city, one by one. The Lahore Gate was still in control of the rebels. This was taken on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and subsequently the Jama Masjid and the Ajmer Gate were captured.

The British finally went towards the palace of the King, which was the nerve centre of all activity, on the same day. But the Red fort was not even defended. It is said that at each gate was a lone soldier carrying a gun, guarding the gate, even the knowledge of imminent death not perturbing these guards. According to Charles John Griffith they were *Ghazis* who would court any danger under the effects of *bhang* (as said before, this was not unknown in India).

Delhi had been won, but the King was absconding. The loss of the Red fort and the city took the will to fight out of Bahadur Shah. His Commander-in-Chief Bakht Khan wanted him to flee with the *sipahi* army which was still almost wholly intact and prepare for a fight from the open plains. At least if the people knew the King was still free they would be persuaded to prolong the rebellion. Besides the rout of Delhi was also not complete at this point since the British had suffered many casualties and according to Kaye had only around 3000 men fit for service. But the old King took the advice of his queen and courtiers and decided to surrender. The *sipahi* army departed while he retired to Humayun's tomb and William Hodson of Hodson's Horse went to apprehend

him with the strict injunction being given to him that the old King was not to be harmed.

There were still the princes to be captured too, since they had actively participated in the rebellion. Hodson learnt that they were hiding in and around Humayun's tomb. Hodson again asked for permission to capture them and received it but with no additional requirement to bring them back alive. Hodson, at length, persuaded the princes to surrender with their followers, but without offering the promise of sparing their lives, and confiscated their arms and put them in a cart. These were Mirza Khizr Sultan, Mirza Mughal and Mirza Abu Bakr. The cart started rolling in the direction of Lahore Gate. While they were passing what is today known as the Khooni Darwaza on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg Hodson asked the three princes to get down and strip. Then he shot them all point-blank. The reason given for this act was that the curious crowd of onlookers surrounding them was too close for comfort and prudence demanded the killings. The propriety of Hodson's behavior has been debated ever since.

On 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1858 the trial of Bahadur Shah started in the Red fort and after forty days he was convicted of making war against the British and killing of Europeans. In the same year Queen Victoria took over the reins of the country from the East India Company and declared that the British would henceforth give due weightage to the long-held laws, and customs of India while administering justice. The British had gotten their fingers burnt by their tinkering in the religious maze called India and would have no more of it. The native kings were assured that there would henceforth not be any violations on their rights and treaties signed with the British would be honoured.

After Delhi was won back the British turned their attention to the plain around Delhi. Many of the rebels who had escaped after the assault on Delhi were now free to join their fellow fighters in the plain. A party was dispatched to Agra to help those hiding inside the Red fort there. It went on its way crossing Bulandshahr and Khurja defeating the rebel forces on the way. Here Malleson says they saw the sight of a skeleton with a severed head on the roadside. It was found to be that of a European female, showing that in their fury the rebels could be as barbarous as their British counterparts.

The British forces crossed Aligarh and reached Agra, where they set camp in the parade grounds. Interestingly the rebels were in the cantonment itself, unknown to the Agra fort authorities. Some of them tried to enter the fort disguised as conjurors and upon being denied entry cut down the advance guard. Meanwhile the rebel cavalry sprung out of hiding and started attacking, almost before the British could react. It took the combined efforts of the freshly arrived British party and that inside the fort to repel the ambush and successfully chase the rebels to the river stream. In this way the other historic capital was also retained by the English.

Now it was just a matter of time before the revolting plains of Hindustan would revert to British rule and the Great Uprising would end. By the end of 1858 even the last flickers of the flame were dying. By May 1859 Awadh, the central point of the drama, was also finally reported to be at peace.

The war for India's independence had been lost and another major effort to make the English leave the country would not be launched until Gandhi came back from South Africa to India. So why was the almost-won battle lost? The Uprising was essentially a spontaneous emotional response to the rule of the outsider, and hence generally remained incohesive. The British were able to recuperate from the early shock and mount a concerted attack even when outnumbered heavily by the rebels; also it must be remembered that at the time of the revolt the British army was one of the most impressive fighting-machines in the world. Then they were also helped by some of the princely states. The Kings of Patiala and Jind, the Scindia of Gwalior and even the Nizam remained faithful to their English masters. Besides, there were a lot of Indians in the British army who fought against their own countrymen. In fact, Kaye is all-praise for these soldiers who fought with as equal ardour as their 'Christian employers'. Finally, the choice by the revolted of their leader was a bad one. Bahadur Shah was an old man when he became the reluctant and puppet leader of the rebellion. But the monarch at Delhi had an emotional appeal for the warring masses, a call to return to the olden, golden days of Mughal rule. After the fall of Delhi had the King shown more enterprise and courage and escaped to the plains there is a chance the rebels would have held on for a longer period.

## After the Uprising

The much-needed Indian view of the Uprising at Delhi and later events has been captured by India's Poet Ghalib in his narrative called *Dastanbuy*. When the rebels had proclaimed Bahadur Shah as leader many nobles joined his standard. Awadh's last *nawab* Wajid Ali Shah's ten-year-old son was made the *wazir*.

When the British attacked on the fourteenth of September they killed those they found on the streets. The townspeople, who were not involved in the fighting, had to remain locked inside their houses. For two or three days there was mayhem on the roads, and people left their houses only to get food.

He writes of these days "There is neither merchant nor buyer; there is no seller of wheat from whom we can buy flour, nor is there a washer-man to whom we can give our soiled garments; there is no barber to trim hair, or sweeper to clean our floors... Gradually, whatever provisions we had in our homes were consumed. Although we had used the water with great care, not a single drop remained in cup or jar...they (the people of his lane) selected one man from every house and managed to procure some brackish water. In such a way they filled their thirst...One day clouds suddenly appeared and it rained. We tied up a sheet in our courtyard and placed our jars beneath it and in this way we collected water..."

"...during this storm and turmoil the nature of calamity is different in every lane and bazaar. The manner of killing and looting by the soldiers is not uniform but varies, and whether a soldier shows kindness or not depends on his individual nature..."

The prisons and lock-ups were crammed with people, many of whom were hanged. The *jagirdars* of neighbouring Jhajjar, Farrukhnagar and Ballabhgarh were captured and kept in the Red fort and later killed. In January of 1858 the Hindus were allowed to return to their homes in the city, but not the Muslims. Ghalib says at this time there were not more than a thousand Muslims in the city. Many of the Muslims who had left the city were living at some distance from the city, on the Ridge or in makeshift mud huts, eagerly waiting to return to the city when the condition improved, and the British permitted.

Despite his depressing narrative Ghalib was lucky. After the British had captured Delhi and wreaked vengeance on the locals he escaped unharmed. The ruler of Patiala Raja Narendra Singh had sided with the British and many of his officials had houses in the same lane as Ghalib. So when the city was re-captured by the British the Raja had his sentries posted at the entrance of the lane to save the inhabitants from harm.

Others of course were not so fortunate. Kaye gives a candid view of Delhi in the aftermath. Once the British soldiers entered the Palace they killed all who were found there and dinner was had in the splendid Diwan-e-Khas. Now that Delhi was again in the hands of the *firangis* they vented their fury on the hapless citizens who remained behind. Kaye writes "those who had never struck a blow against us ... were pierced by our bayonets, or cloven by our sabres, or brained by our muskets or rifles ... The very sight of a dark man stimulated our national enthusiasm almost to the point of frenzy ... many innocent men were shot down or otherwise massacred. Some of the best and bravest of our officers sanctioned, if they did not take part in these outrages; and it is doubtful if they could have controlled the excesses of their fighting-men, especially when they were maddened by much drink."

There were still gangs of rebels, or disgruntled elements, who would routinely waylay or attack the occupying army. One such incident maddened Major James Brind to the extent that he set on a retributive mission to teach a lesson to the Hindustani brutes, and many of the guilty were rounded up and killed. The number of those so slain was given as one hundred and fifty to two hundred persons. Similarly those men attempting to escape dressed as women were caught and disposed of. Kaye asserts that women and children were not harmed during and after the conquest of Delhi by the chivalrous English troops and this statement is supported by Ghalib. In fact the same Major Brind had respectfully escorted out of the city gates hundreds of women, children, the old and the handicapped.

Kaye also narrates the search for treasure all around Delhi by the troops. The Sikhs led this search, but the Europeans were not far behind. About the Sikhs he writes

"Their natural astuteness, aided by perhaps some experiences elsewhere, had taught them how to discern the lurking places of hidden treasure. It might be buried beneath the floors of their houses or bricked up in their walls... nothing was more patent than the energy of their endeavours, for almost everywhere battered walls

and wrenched up floors told plainly what they had done. It was clearly ascertained too, that large quantities of plunder were handed over the walls to their brethren below, and that afterwards numbers of carts passed out at the opposite gates of the city."

But the most detailed and interesting account of the humiliation and mutilation of Delhi during re-occupation comes from Charles John Griffith in his book "A Narrative Of The Siege Of Delhi - With An Account Of The Mutiny At Ferozepore In 1857". I would like to dwell a bit on this narrative. The town had been ransacked to the fullest extent, and every article of furniture had been broken by the soldiers and thrown out of the windows on to the streets. This wrecked furniture formed barricades several feet high in the narrow streets. In the wealthier houses wealthy brocades and such finery were torn to shreds, articles were smashed to pieces and there was general mayhem everywhere. Not a single house or building was intact (A lot of this destruction was caused by the sepoys and vagabonds of the city during the siege of Delhi, when they had looted and blackmailed the richer inhabitants of the city. This is also borne out by Ghalib's narration. The rest of the plunder was the handiwork of the victorious British army). The European soldiers were alone in the city and not a soul to be seen. It was only after a few days that they realized that in the underground rooms or *tehkhanas* many of the old and infirm who could not leave the city had taken refuge. There were crowds of people huddled together, starving patiently. This matches Kaye's description of women and children found huddled together in a house. Anyway, hundreds of these miserable people were led out of the city through the Lahore Gate. Many must have perished of starvation in those uncertain days where it was each man for himself. The other sad sight was of the numberless corpses of rebels or inhabitants who had been killed. The bodies lay exposed to the elements, putrefying and raising a stench. Though many had been disposed of by the undertakers there were many more that were lying rotting. Cholera and ague epidemic had spread among the troops in Delhi. Two thousand of the sick and wounded were moved to the pure air and open ground of the Salimgarh fort so that they convalesced faster. After Delhi was captured such was the fury of the British that execution by hanging was an everyday occurrence. Rebels or those who were caught in possession of arms were instantly dispatched. One such incident was where an officer caught a few men escaping from the city. He called his soldiers, took the prisoners to a ditch, and had them shot. They were buried in the ditch itself. Even the gorgeous Jama Masjid was not left undefiled. The Punjab Rifles Corps was stationed there, while a rumour spread that it was decided to blow up the Masjid. With the people gone their pets were left to fend for themselves. Many of these poor creatures died of hunger. Some of the stray dogs, stretched to an extremity, had taken up to eating the putrid dead bodies.

Like J. W. Kaye the writer Griffith also mentions about the exhaustive search for Delhi's fabled treasure by the victorious troops, but in much more florid language. All the troops on the British side, especially the Sikhs, saw the prospect of looting Delhi's treasures as a fit recompense for the toil they had done and the danger they had courted during the siege. In fact even during the skirmish many soldiers got hold of jewellery and such-like items from the bodies of dead rebels or from the city denizens.

A few days before the capture of Delhi a notice from General Wilson promised the troops that all the treasure and items seized in Delhi would be kept in a common fund and would be distributed justly. Later the powers that be decided to hoodwink the soldiers with just a six months' extra allowance or *batta*. This met with stiff opposition from the troops and finally the government capitulated and distributed the loot as well as the six months' *batta* to them, but not before a wise-guy wrote on the walls of the palace the graffito "Delhi taken and India saved for 36 rupees and 10 annas." The Governor-General demanded the name of the brazen author of these words so that he could receive condign punishment but none of his comrades would reveal him. Griffith says that all soldiery indulged in the looting that was taking place, a good amount of it was secretly pocketed and some was deposited in the common fund to be distributed later (the pocketed booty was taken to England where it was sold at an appropriate opportunity. Griffith also says that a good number of non-commissioned officers and men bought their discharge there). Special prize agents had also been nominated to collect the booty and put it in the common fund. The rooms of these prize agents were filled with jewellery,

precious stones, diamonds, pearls, gold ornaments, gold *mohurs*, etc. Griffith states another interesting fact that when the people of Delhi started returning back to their city, whole streets which had not been searched by prize agents were sold for 5,000 to 50,000 rupees. This further augmented the common fund. The prize money was distributed in two parts, once in 1862 and later in 1865.

Griffith also narrates his own experience of finding a treasure, when he teamed up with a friend who was an assistant of a prize agent. This friend acquired information from a native workman of a treasure concealed in a rich man's house, in return for a small share to the informer; so avarice was not the exclusive domain of the British alone, even the Indians were willing to collude with the English against their own countrymen. In the store-room of the rich man's house Griffith and his team dug out a big jar full of 700 gold *mohurs*, intricate gold ornaments and artifacts, precious stones, numberless pearls and a large diamond worth 1000 pounds, the total loot amounting to at least 7000 pounds of the time. Then there was the time when they went into a Hindu temple near Chandni Chowk, and after destroying the statue of one of the gods and upon digging under it found a casket full of jewels and gold.

On a third occasion his team broke into the house of an artisan making miniature paintings typical of that time. A hoard of these paintings was confiscated and twenty of them were pinched by Griffith. They were later sold for a handsome price.

This was yet another episode of foreigners helping to lighten the burden of the wealth of Hindustan.

## Lutyens/New[est] Delhi

The last Delhi Durbar was held in the year 1911 to celebrate the coronation and the visit of the 'Decider of India's Fate' the British monarch King George V and his queen Mary. It was at this occasion that he announced the transfer of the seat of Government of India from Calcutta lying at one end of India to the ancient city of Delhi, which was in the heart of India and so was a natural choice. This announcement entailed the building of a new imperial city with the Secretariat, the Viceroy's House, and other structures to support the administration of this vast land. Lord Hardinge chose the site of Raisina hill and village for the future city. Architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker were given the commission to design the new city. Lutyens had already gained renown for his numerous late-Victorian bungalows while Baker was known for building the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa. Of course there were others too like Robert Tor Russell, E. Montague Thomas, W.H. Nicholls, C.G. and F.B. Blomfield, Walter Sykes George, Arthur Gordon Shoosmith and Henry Medd who made the new city possible, but over time the area of the imperial capital has become famous as Lutyens Delhi.

The boundary of Lutyens' city roughly extends from Rashtrapati Bhavan, nestled in the folds of the Southern Ridge Forest, to the environs of India Gate going from west to east and from Connaught Place to around Safdarjung tomb near Race Course (now renamed to Lok Kalyan Marg, translating to People's Welfare Street) going from north to south. An excellent and rather embellished critique of the city is provided by Robert Byron in a 1931 edition of the Architectural Review.

The main roadway of this city is the Rajpath extending from India Gate all the way to Rashtrapati Bhavan or the President's House which was known as the Viceroy's Lodge before independence. This is also the path for the Republic Day Parade which takes place every year on 26<sup>th</sup> January. Oftentimes I have taken a leisurely stroll along this route starting from India Gate.

India Gate is a tall, free-standing arch built by Lutyens and was then known as the All-India War Memorial in memory of the soldiers who had died in the First World War and the third Anglo-Afghan War. The names of the martyrs are engraved over the walls. Also engraved are the words India surrounded by 1914 and 1919 written in Roman script, to signify the years of the wars. As with the other buildings this monument also received a Hindustani touch with the addition of a flattish dome on top.

The monument sees a lot of visitors especially after sunset when the venue is lit up, giving it a festive look. As one walks away from India Gate there are huge green lawns on both sides with a good sprinkling of trees. On the other side of the lawns are pools of water lined by colourful flower-beds. At times they have been used for boating and during summer one can see poor, naked kids, jumping in and out the pools gleefully. At length one reaches Vijay Chowk, formerly known as the Great Place, from where the slope of the hill of Raisina starts. To the right one can see the top of the easily recognized circular structure of the Parliament House with its many columns; this was originally known as the Central Legislative Assembly. In front is the beautiful view of the North and South Block buildings and in between them the eastern façade of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

But there is a hitch here. Seen from the plain ground at Vijay Chowk only the top of the Rashtrapati Bhavan is seen, and this is not how Lutyens had envisioned it. The original plan was to have the Secretariat buildings of the North and South Block at ground level so that the President's House would be entirely seen from afar. But later Lutyens agreed to accommodate the Secretariat buildings on the hill, and thus obscuring the view.

Lutyens was to regret his decision later, and have a feud with his friend Herbert Baker over this, souring their friendship.

Nevertheless these buildings are still an architectural wonder, and on going up the incline of Raisina one can begin to comprehend the achievement of Lutyens' team. These two identical, majestic, domed buildings of the North and South Block of the Secretariat can leave the first time visitor awestruck. They house the offices of the key cabinet ministries of Finance, Home Ministry, Defence, External Affairs as well as the Prime Minister's Office. The buildings are built of red and yellow sandstone. Herbert Baker's design blends the European and Hindustani styles beautifully. The use of the two-storey arch for the main entrance shows the Mughal influence while the generous use of columns gives it a Roman character. Even the central Renaissance dome with its *jaalis* and columns and surrounded by *chhatris* has a mixed character. Each building has arm-like extensions

with high, pillared galleries, while there is the usual garden with pools containing fountains, but it was the red stone lamp-posts which were utterly fascinating.

At the end of the road, barred to the visitors, is the Rashtrapati Bhavan spread over an area of 380 acres; one has to contend with a far-off view of the iconic building and the ornate Jaipur column rising out of the ground in front of it. Besides this, there is also the presence of the overzealous guards who for security reasons do not let a car be parked anywhere in the area, or even let a tourist stay for long. A few quick pictures of these edifices and off you go!

I got my chance to see the Rashtrapati Bhavan closely on a visit to its famed Mughal Gardens. Around the end of winter the gardens on the President's Estate are open to public for a month, and Delhi flocks there in large numbers to take advantage of this privilege. The verdant grounds have been divided into various parts and the track took the visitors through each of them. The first was called the Herbal Garden with various herbs like *tulsi*, *shatavari*, *aloe-vera*, *sarpagandha*, and evening prim rose, among others planted in patches, to be followed by the Bonsai Garden with varieties of stunted versions of banyan, pipal, pine, guava and orange trees. Next in line was the Musical Garden in which the performing fountains dominated. This led to the main attraction, the 15-acre Mughal Garden which was laid close to the Rashtrapati Bhavan building. It was a riot of colours in every direction. One could find flowers of every colour, whether red, pink, white, purple, lilac or yellow, there were roses, lilies, petunias, tulips, flowers of every variety. As its name suggests the Mughal Garden was landscaped on the ancient *char-bagh* concept of the carpet-garden which will be familiar to the reader by now. The weave of this carpet had an intricate pattern of walkways with rows of flowers lining on both sides. In other places there were multi-coloured patches of flowers surrounded by green lawn, as well as dense, shapely, pruned trees. There were the characteristic wide pools of water with fountains at intervals giving it a soothing appeal. There were some curious varieties of roses like the Mother Teresa rose, the Christian Dior Rose and the Montezuma Rose which was pretty amusing. There were still other plants with names like Folklore, Oklahoma and Eiffel Tower which were baffling, to say the least.

Mid-way through the walk I noticed that separated from me by a small lawn at close quarters stood the two wings of the majestic Rashtrapati Bhavan. Like the Secretariat buildings of Baker even this structure was predominantly made of yellow and red stone. The huge dome at the top was made in the style of the Buddhist *stupa* at Sanchi, and stood out due to the black stone used for the dome's curvature. The same fusion of Indian and Western architecture styles dominated here too, with *chhatris* on the top and *chhaja* at the roof's edge and use of columns and rectangular, not arched, windows. The *chhatris* with their own protruding *chhajjas* were, as Byron puts it, "severe, and barely rise above the level of the parapet. Their purpose is not to decorate but to define the roof-line and to put the dome in a higher perspective in the viewer's eye." To keep the building cool in the notorious Delhi summer there were fountains in the shape of bowls on the roof too, overflowing with water into the interior of the building.

On the way out was the popular Circular Garden which was again a deftly manicured space full of flowers of the greatest variety, with a fountain right at the centre, drawing gasps from the crowd. The President's post may be a ceremonial one but it surely has a great many tempting perks.

I could see that great effort had gone into tending for the Mughal Gardens, but I found them to be a bit gaudy for my taste. The entire space was meant to dazzle the onlooker with its splendor rather than being a soothing, rejuvenating experience.

Byron, a huge fan of Lutyens, called the Secretariat buildings as 'ancillaries' of the President's House. He was so impressed by it that he wrote "its character is so arresting, so unprecedented, so uninviting of comparison with known architecture, that, like a sovereign crowned and throned, it subordinates everything within view to increase its own state, and stands not to be judged by, but to judge, its attendants. The Secretariats, remarkable buildings in themselves, exist only in relation to it, and inasmuch as they minister to its success." Byron is bold enough to indicate who he thinks is the better of the two architects, Lutyens or Baker.

The layout of Lutyens' Delhi consists of circles with several roads radiating out of a circle and connecting it to other circles. The earlier plan was to build a Manhattan-style grid-like layout with roads at strict right angles to each other, but was shunned citing the famous dust storms of the plains as the reason. It was desirable to keep

an uneven layout in terms of direction to break the force of the storms.

After independence, in the renaming of roads King's Way became Rajpath while Queen's Way became Janpath. Today one finds roads named after emperors like Ashoka, Akbar, Shah Jahan, Prithviraj, and Tughlaq sultans like Firoz Shah. Then there are roads named after freedom fighters like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Tilak, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. There are also names like Tees January Marg (30<sup>th</sup> January Road) to immortalize the date on which Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in G.D. Birla's bungalow lying on this street. Then there are roads which have names like Simon Bolivar Marg, Panchsheel Marg, Tolstoy Road or even Kamal Atatürk Marg based on the preference of our founding fathers. The renaming of roads as a political statement continues to this day, depending on which political party is in power in New Delhi. Recently Aurangzeb Road was given a new name as this bigoted Emperor's name is anathema to the right-wingers.

The residential area that was built by Lutyens' team is today called the Lutyens Bungalow Zone (LBZ). This consists of thousands of acres of land devoted to palatial bungalows for politicians and top bureaucrats. A walk in the Race Course area will give an idea of the sheer luxury of this place. There are rows of white-washed bungalows with lawns in front on both sides of the road. The roads themselves are lined with shady trees on the sides, while the pavements have hedges separating them from the road. There is a sense of lushness to the area, almost like in a rainforest. While walking through the LBZ I could read the nameplates on the gates announcing one owner to be a cabinet minister, the next was the Chief Justice of India, and two more belonging to senior ministers. Further on I saw a posse of guards in military fatigues waiting to escort a parliamentarian of the opposition party.

There are also houses of leading industrialists in the LBZ which must have cost them the sky. Real estate here is expectedly one of the most expensive in the country. A bungalow may easily be sold for a few hundreds of crores, yet there is no scarcity of buyers as most affluent people want to flaunt an LBZ address. One may find such grandeur in a poor country like India out-of-place but it provides much needed green space in a congested Delhi. And to protect this green cover there are strict guidelines for buildings falling within LBZ. One cannot build a high-rise in this zone and even refurbishing an existing property requires special permission.

Inside the limit of the Lutyens' zone are the cultural havens of India Habitat Centre and National Gallery of Modern Art, and numerous museums, most notably the very well-maintained National Museum, National Archives of India and the Nehru Museum, besides the Supreme Court of the land.

After 20 years of the announcement of its birth the new capital was formally inaugurated in February 1931 by the then Viceroy Lord Irwin. But the British were able to enjoy this accomplishment of theirs for only sixteen more years till 1947 which saw the end of the British empire in India. The building cost of the city overshot its original budget, as usually happens, and drew protests at such extravagance in a poverty-ridden country. But such extravagance, which was possible only by a foreign, occupying power, did give Delhi this masterpiece. Most Delhi-wallahs I know would like to think of Lutyens Delhi as a positive part of the imperial legacy in India.

## Connaught Place

If I had to choose a place which could be called the heart of modern-day Delhi it would be Connaught Place or CP, sometimes, also called the gateway to Lutyens' Delhi. Architected by Robert Tor Russell its plan consists of two concentric rings of double-storey buildings built around a park at the centre and radially converging roads. The circular roads between the central park and the two rings of buildings are called as the inner circle, middle circle and the outer circle. Built in the 1930s the white-washed buildings in the rings are in the old colonial style, complete with colonnaded walkways. The place is the favourite hang-out of the young as well as the old of Delhi.

It is perpetually bustling with activity, hawkers selling their wares on the pavements, while the young crowd swirls around the inner circle leisurely, or fills up the various restaurants, bars and cafes that dot the place. I have enjoyed many aimless hours consuming cup after cup of coffee with friends, or simply walked around this most frequented of places. The real estate here also is one of the most expensive in the country, and as a result a majority of the original establishments have shut shop. Today, one mostly finds outlets selling branded goods, mainly there for the visibility CP provides.



One of my earlier visits took me to the nearby Lakshmi Narayan Mandir, simply called Birla Temple. Built in the 1930s by the famous Birla family, it was a striking yellow-and-maroon structure, built according to traditional temple architecture, with three majestic temple towers rising up in the sky, standing side-by-side. Housing the statues and pictures in relief of many popular gods, goddesses and saints of Hindus, but also of its off-shoot religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, it was a pan-Hindu temple. Characteristically, on the walls were engraved lines from scriptures like the Upanishads and Gita. Like the other Birla temples this one also had a sanitized, squeaky clean look. Sitting inside the white-marble interior of the temple was very peaceful, though it was not a very quiet place. The people around looked as though they were out for a family picnic with everybody having a gala time.

While moving around the temple I came to a balcony from where I could see a buffet table on the ground below and people being served lunch. I thought it was *langar* and I was feeling peckish; besides, *langars* are much tastier than restaurant food so I decided to join in. But I felt awkward eating a free lunch so I took out a fifty-rupee note and quietly slipped it into a donation box near me. Then unable to find my way to the buffet table I asked a guard standing nearby how I could reach it. The guard said "No, that lunch is not for the general public. The people down there are pilgrims staying in our *dharamshala* (guest house) and they had informed us beforehand that they would be coming today so the food was prepared for them".

So there was no *langar* to be had at the Birla temple. When I came out of the temple the sky had become overcast, and the first drops of rain had started falling; this brought great joy to my heart, the undescribable joy the spectacle of monsoon brings. After the parched summer months the rains come as a literal godsend to the plains of India. Great poems have been written on this phenomenon by the ancients. The Sikh guru Nanak writes about the summer month of *Ashad*:

In Ashad the sun scorches  
The sky is hot  
The earth burns like a furnace  
Water gives up vapour...

Then, he contrasts it with the rainy months of *Saawan* and *Bhadon*:

The season of rain has come  
My heart is full of joy...  
River and land are one expanse of water  
For it is the glad season of the rains...  
Frogs croak with contentment  
Peacocks dance with joy...

I made my way to the Bangla Sahib Gurudwara, and was glad to see that *langar* was being served there. This gurudwara was pretty grand as compared to the SisGanj Sahib I had visited earlier in Chandni Chowk since there were no space constraints here; it was situated in what was once part of Raisina village. The main building was a two-storey, pearly white edifice with circular domes at the top, while the main dome was still two levels further above. These domes showed the Islamic effect on Sikh architecture. The domes were golden, following the example set by the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Inside the prayer hall also there was a gorgeous gold-plated, decorated canopy right above the place where the Holy Scripture was kept, and the ceiling and pillars around it were also gold-plated. This temple is linked with the eighth Sikh guru Hari Krishen. He had been summoned to Delhi by Aurangzeb since the Emperor wanted to play a role in deciding who would be the next Sikh guru, Hari Krishen or his elder brother Ram Rai. While in Delhi he was staying at the house of Raja Jai Singh. He contracted smallpox and subsequently died at the tender age of eight. It is at the site of Jai Singh's residence that the present gurudwara has been built and is thereby called Bangla Sahib, the word '*bangla*' meaning bungalow.

By now the few raindrops had turned to a regular drizzle. To my delight I saw that to the right of the main hall

there was a large pool, which added greatly to the ambience. I went to the pool; there were many varieties of fish, drawn to the edge in search of food offered by devotees. The raindrops falling in the tank, and the dark, grey, overcast sky reflected in the large expanse of water was a view that sent a thrill down my spine. Water bodies have long been a part of temple complexes in India, as a water body is supposed to have a calming effect on the human mind. Due to its association with the Guru the water of this tank is considered holy by the Sikhs. But in the cold, rainy weather there were no bathers today.

When it stopped raining I proceeded to the famous Jantar Mantar on Sansad Marg which was a ten-minute walk away from Bangla Sahib. This strange looking place was an almost three-hundred year old ancient astronomical observatory with all the convoluted structures being astronomical instruments, set right in the middle of Delhi. After looking at the dozens of *masjids*, forts and tombs and their frilly exteriors the bare, utilitarian structure of Jantar Mantar came as a welcome change. This observatory was built by Maharaja Jai Singh, the founder of Jaipur, in the early eighteenth century. He built other Jantar Mantars too at Ujjain, Mathura, Varanasi and at Jaipur.

As I walked around the gigantic instruments reading about them, I had to strain my memory to remember every bit of geography I had learnt at school. The instruments worked on the principle of the sun-dial. The sun's rays fell on the apparatus and cast a shadow. The direction and extent of the shadow helped to gauge the time as well as other attributes like elevation.

The humongous size of the instruments meant that the resulting measurements were very highly accurate. This helped to track precisely the movements of celestial bodies, so important to the astrology-obsessed Indians. There were four kinds of *yantras* or devices, as the structures were called. These were the Misra Yantra, Samrat Yantra, Jaiprakash Yantra and the two similar looking Ram Yantras.

The highest instrument, the Samrat Yantra, was a 65-feet high incline along the earth's axis. On its sides were two quarter circles which were calibrated with markings for time. As the sun moved across the sky the position of its shadow on these quadrants told the local time of Delhi.

The Jaiprakash Yantra was an improved hemispherical sun-dial and it consisted of two calibrated hemispheres built side-by-side.

On the far side were the two Ram Yantras, looking like miniature replicas of the Colosseum in Rome. Each Ram Yantra had a circular wall with a pole at the centre. The wall had markings on it and the floor was also divided into 30 sections. These markings helped to measure the horizontal and vertical angles of the heavenly bodies. Finally the Misra Yantra was basically a smaller Samrat Yantra with four calibrated, semicircular inclines. This instrument measured the angular distance to a heavenly body as it moved through the sky. There was a quarter-circle to the west which helped to keep track of the daily movement of a heavenly object.

What was admirable about these devices was the precision required in their construction, so that accurate measurements could be possible, and one wondered what special masonry techniques were used three hundred years ago to make that kind of precision possible.

After my geography lesson at Jantar Mantar I walked towards the popular Coffee House on the adjacent road. The cold, rainy day meant it was the right time to have a cup of hot, filter coffee.

## Gandhi in Delhi

The Father of the Nation had just a political association with Delhi. However his memory has been indelibly etched in Delhi by his assassination. The site of his assassination has been converted into the Gandhi Smriti (Gandhi Memorial), and is visited by a large number of tourists every day. Sadly one sees more foreigners visiting it than Indians. The erstwhile Birla House belonging to the industrialist G.D. Birla is a whitewashed building in the peaceful, leafy surroundings of Tees January Marg where the Mahatma was staying in the January of 1948. He had stayed there many times before, though his preferred location was the poorer Bhangi Colony. The reasons given by the pragmatic Mahatma for staying there this time around were "My main object in staying in Delhi is to give to the Muslims whatever comfort I can. That object was better served by my staying at the Birla House. Muslim friends felt safer in coming here than in the poor quarters of Delhi. Moreover, it was much easier for the members of the Cabinet to come to see me at the Birla House, as most of them were staying close by." Near the entrance of the Gandhi Smriti are the two rooms in which he stayed and worked. Earlier he had gone around the northern part of the country to assuage the ill-will in the populace kindled by the partition of the country and thereafter came and stayed at the Birla House for five months till the fateful day arrived.

It was past five in the evening and he was late for his evening prayer meeting for which people congregated from far and wide. He walked from his rooms to the meeting place out in the open. A crowd of people had already gathered and was waiting for Bapu, as he was affectionately called. In the crowd were also some plainclothesmen since an attempt had already been made on his life (this attempt on his life was made ten days earlier when at a prayer meeting a bomb had exploded fifty yards from him, fortunately injuring none). As he approached the crowd a young man of twenty-five named Nathuram Vinayak Godse came forward, greeted him, brought forth his revolver and pumped bullets into the Mahatma's chest and leg. The frail body collapsed to the ground, still with his hands folded, and there was tumult all over. The people stood paralyzed for some time before somebody seized the assassin and the police came forward to arraign him. The Mahatma's body was taken to his room where he was pronounced dead.

It took just a few moments to snuff the life out of the saintly person, who had come as the messiah of the Indian people. His effect on India was aptly captured by Pandit Nehru in his first address after the assassination when he said "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere". The Birla House became a national monument and at the spot of the killing is a small shrine dedicated to Bapu with the words 'Hey Ram' inscribed on it.

The next day a procession started its 4.5 kilometre long march to the Mahatma's final resting place. His body was kept in an open coffin atop a modified Dodge weapon carrier, which was pulled by two hundred men of the armed forces using ropes. The mass of humanity following the Mahatma on his final journey formed a procession two miles long. The body was cremated near the bank of the river Jumna, the funeral pyre being lit by his youngest son Ramdas. The location was Raj Ghat which has now become famous, with a steady stream of tourists visiting it, getting their photographs taken with the Mahatma's cremation ground as the backdrop. Most foreign dignitaries visiting Delhi are also taken on an almost mandatory tour of Rajghat.

The Mahatma's ashes were then taken to the Sangam in Allahabad on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1948 in a special train and were immersed in the holy Ganga.

Next to the Raj Ghat is the National Gandhi Museum which has a wealth of memorabilia related to Gandhi. It is a conspicuously simple building containing the Mahatma's relics and instruments he used in the struggle for freedom. There is a room containing his walking stick and watches. There is the famous bust of his three favourite monkeys teaching the maxim 'See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil'. Then there are his clogs and some daily items used by him, and amusingly the museum has also preserved two of his extracted teeth. There is the original of the famous letter written by Rabindranath Tagore to him, showing the deep respect and affection that existed between the two of them. He begins by cautioning the Mahatma "Passive resistance is a force which is not necessarily moral in itself; it can be used against truth as well as for it. The danger inherent in all force grows stronger when it is likely to gain success, for then it becomes temptation." He likens Gandhi to Lord Buddha and in his inimitable manner puts in perspective India's servile position by writing 'the great gift of

freedom can never come to a people through charity. We must win it before we can own it. And India's opportunity for winning it will come to her when she can prove she is morally superior to the people who rule her by their right of conquest. She must willingly accept her penance of suffering- the suffering which is the crown of the great. Armed with her utter faith in the goodness she must stand unabashed before the arrogance that scoffs at the power of spirit”.

Perhaps the museum's most important exhibits are the blood-stained *dhoti* and shawl that the Mahatma was wearing on the day of his assassination. Next to them is one of the bullets that were extracted from his body. Seeing them is a bit overwhelming for the first-time visitor. But the museum does bring to life a vivid image of the times of Gandhi. It was here more than anywhere else that I felt that his spirit animated the place.

So what made the populace of India respect and revere this frail, puny man so much that they all rose en masse at his behest? What made them connect to this man who could at the best of times be difficult to deal with, who would obstinately insist on having his own way. Whole tomes can be written on this rich and debatable subject. However the reason for Gandhi's warm appeal has again been captured by this quote of Rabindranath Tagore “He stopped at the thresholds of the dispossessed, dressed like one of their own. He spoke to them in their own language. Here was living truth at last and not only quotations from books. For this reason the Mahatma, the name given to him by the people of India, is his real name. Who else has felt like him that all Indians are his own flesh and blood? When love came at the door of India, that door was opened wide. At Gandhi's call India blossomed forth to new greatness “.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the political son and heir of the Mahatma, was the son of an eminent lawyer Motilal Nehru. He was educated in England and came back to India to practice law, but as fate would have it he got involved in the political climate of the country. The despair and despondency of the peasantry and the incompletely developed middle classes of the country caught his attention. In his book 'The Discovery of India' Nehru writes of his own helplessness at the situation of the country. “What could we do? How could we pull India out of this quagmire of poverty and defeatism which sucked her in? Not for a few years of excitement and agony and suspense, but for long generations our people had offered their ‘blood and toil, tears and sweat’”. And then he contrasts it with Gandhi's coming to India in the words “*And then Gandhi came*. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths; like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds. He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition.”

Gandhi was not just an apostle of peace but was almost militant in the advocacy of achieving freedom through peaceful means. His philosophy of Satyagraha or 'Truth force' has echoes of Buddhism and is aimed at the moral conquest of the adversary through the force of truth. He describes Satyagraha as “It is gentle, it never wounds. It must not be the result of anger or malice. It is never fussy, never impatient, never vociferous. It is the direct opposite of compulsion. It was conceived as a complete substitute of violence”. He firmly believed that the path India took to its freedom would be the path it would continue to follow after independence. That is why at the height of the non Co-operation Movement when the Chauri Chaura incident where protesters set fire to a police station killing 23 policemen, Gandhi unilaterally called a halt to the movement. He was in the truest sense of the word the leader of his people, the leader who believed that the means are as important as the end and imbued these values in his followers.

The one aspect which outshone all others was that he never said a lie and this endeared him to the people since they saw him always live up to his own words 'My life is my message'. Gandhi did not live his life to suit the contemporary morality or to project the façade of a benign, lovable leader, but was a man in search of truth in the true Vedic sense. This search for truth made him renounce all his belongings, including his shirt. Of course his frugal lifestyle, besides elevating his stature, also made him a nuisance for the administration. Wherever he went crowds would throng to receive him. The logistics of the arrangements required to be made for his visits once made Sarojini Naidu remark to him “Do you know how much it costs everyday to keep you in poverty?”

Gandhi's enduring legacy is that of a saint among people, a savior who came at the right hour to save the

country from the degradation caused by foreign rule, the guardian of the country's morality and ultimately a martyr for his cause of gaining freedom for a united India. However the real person was much more complex and also interesting. His experiments with truth brought him at odds with his supporters in the Indian National Congress as well as his family members but he never swerved from his path, but he could easily alter his point of view if he thought he had been wrong in his previous assessments. His genuine concern for those languishing in the lowest strata of society in any country and his freely intermingling with them made him the idol of the toiling masses, and the tallest leader India had known. It all is summed up beautifully by the great Albert Einstein's tribute to him 'Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a man as this one ever in flesh and blood walked upon this Earth'.

## Other Visits

Anywhere I went in Delhi I was sure to bump into a monument or two. There are scores of them, some cared after by ASI and others falling into disrepair, some standing in the centre of a busy road and some hidden in unknown corners.

What impressed me was that in Delhi all monuments have been converted to parks. Even the smallest, most abject monument has a small lawn around it. In case of a monument lying in a congested *basti* at least the structure would have its own barricaded compound. This prevents its encroachment and eventual ruin. After visiting the grander monuments I started looking for the lesser known ones.

That search took me to places like the beautiful fourteenth century Kalan Masjid or Big Masjid nestled in one of the overcrowded lanes near Turkman Gate; it is very easy to miss it and I had to enquire from the locals to reach it. This is one of the seven mosques built by Firoz Shah Tughlaq's minister, Khan-i-Jahan Junan Shah. The mosques built by him are this Kalan Masjid near Turkman Gate, the Kalan Masjid in Hazrat Nizamuddin area, Khirki Masjid at Saket, Jami Masjid inside Firoz Shah Kotla Fort, Begumpuri Masjid near Hauz Khas, Masjid Kalu Sarai and Chausath Khamba Masjid.

The mosque was completed in the middle of 1387, towards the end of Firoz Shah's rule. The *masjid* was much elevated from the ground level and was reached by a long flight of stairs. It was painted immaculately in white and green colour outside as well as on the inside. Its gate had the easily recognizable, severe, Tughlaq-style architecture with tapering walls similar to its sister mosques, making it look more like the entrance to a citadel. On the inside there was a small central courtyard which had cloisters on three sides and the main prayer hall facing west. In the centre of the courtyard was a small tank with a fountain with fishes swimming in it. Interestingly, the main hall as well as the cloisters were supported on a series of pillared arches running perpendicular to each other. The intersection of two orthogonal arches formed small squares which were covered by a succession of squat domes. Even the interior was stark, with the *mihirabs* furnished very plainly, having no intricate geometric or flower patterns so common to Islamic architecture. It seemed that this mosque was built for utility than to dazzle the beholder. The mosque had remarkably survived the rigours of time, and looked almost intact, unlike the other mosques of Junan Shah.

Qudsia Begum built a house with sprawling gardens; a part of the estate can still be seen near the noisy Kashmere Gate area, a sanctum in the middle of the chaotic metropolis. John Kaye writes about Qudsia Bagh in the year 1857 "It was one of the pleasantest places in the neighbourhood, shaded by orange and lemon trees, and odorous with the perfume of the fruit". The mansion is long gone, but the tall Hathi gate, a grand arched entrance and the Qudsia Mosque still remain. The mosque is an unostentatious but beautiful structure with three bulbous domes topped with prominent finials. Made of a mix of rubble masonry and dainty, flat bricks, and devoid of any hint of marble, it is very subdued when compared to traditional Mughal architecture. The walls have geometrical arched window patterns in relief, culminating in flower patterns, giving it a rather soothing appearance.

Built by Sultan Altamash the Hauz-i-Shamsi is today a shrunken pool in Mehrauli but must have been much bigger earlier. It is often mentioned in the history of Delhi. By the side of the Hauz-i-Shamsi is an unusual monument known as the Jahaaz Mahal. Made in the shape of a small ship, complete with an inclined bow side, this was probably a pleasance. It has a small courtyard in the middle with rooms on the sides, and numerous *chhatris* on top. These delicate looking *chhatris* are in different shapes, square and octagonal, and support domed roofs. The blue tiles used on the domes and the ornate, red-stone, corbel-arch gate point to a 15<sup>th</sup> century construction. In my flight of fancy I envisioned that standing on the other edge of the Hauz-i-Shamsi, this 'Ship Palace', with candles burning in the *chhatris*, must have looked mesmerizing at night. I could not suppress admiring the lively, fertile imagination of the ancient architects.

One of the most dazzling mosques in Delhi is the Kila-e-Kuhna Masjid inside the Purana Qila or Old fort of Delhi built by Sher Shah Suri in 1541. The name of the *masjid* appropriately translates to 'Mosque of the Old

fort'. In a fort where everything seems to have fallen to ruin the mosque along with the nearby Sher Mandal seems to have aged well. This domed structure has five arched gateways, and is built of red and yellow stone, and adorned with white stone intermingling with black marble. Its beauty lies in the intricate carving done on the red sandstone of its walls and gateways and the geometric motifs on the marble of the central arch; not a single inch of space seems to be left untouched by the artisan's hand on this central arch. The best is saved for the *mihirabs* inside; of the five *mihirabs* the central one is by far the most ornate with carving done on pure, white marble, and calligraphic verse inscribed on the edge of the *mihrab*. The six-sided star makes another appearance here and on the gates of the Old fort, as it does on the building of Humayun's tomb. The inner part of the roof along the rim of the dome has niches with colourful tiled patterns, with some niches acting as ventilators. The *masjid* has a sumptuous, well-rounded appearance due to the fact that even the sides and the behind wall are not left bare. There are *jharokhas* at the upper storey on the backside and the sides, while two red-sandstone, carved octagonal viewing galleries stand guard at the back corners.

One of my personal favourites is the Nehru Museum at Teen Murti Bhavan. Teen Murti Bhavan was erected in 1930 as a part of the new imperial capital in today's Chanakypuri area, and post-independence it served as the residence of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, until his death in the year 1964. Thereafter it was converted into a museum which is today known as Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. The complex consists of a long stretch of lush-green lawn at the end of which is the museum. To the left is the library building which houses one of the country's most well-maintained repositories of books, journals and papers on contemporary history, while on the right is a planetarium. While walking through the building I could read the early story of the Nehru family, the Indian freedom struggle and Nehru family's part in it.

The main attraction was his private suite of rooms. There was the living room followed by the study, where he worked till late-night. Further on was the simply furnished bed-room, where he breathed his last. The corridor connecting these rooms was lined on both sides by long book-cases reflecting the predominant interest of the first Prime Minister.

After coming out of the museum on to a side I saw the moving epitaph of Nehru's inscribed in stone "If any of the people choose to think of me then I should like them to say that this was a man who, with all his mind and heart, loved India and the Indian people. And they, in turn, were indulgent to him and gave him their love, most abundantly and extravagantly". Close to it was an eternal flame burning in memory of this illustrious leader.

Of course not all excursions turned out successful; I took plenty of wrong turns. The day I went to the Garden of Five Senses near Saket was one of them. I had read glowing praise of the garden, which is said to be patterned on the ancient Mughal Garden concept, with a modern touch provided by the addition of stainless steel sculptures. It was described as a place where the mind of a Delhi-*wallah* would find peace and quiet and would bring him close to nature. The garden was beautiful alright, with acres of lush, landscaped greenery, water-channels and fountains, statues and winding and tree-lined walkways. And it would have been pretty relaxing if the place were not infested with literally hundreds of couples, in varying degrees of petting. There were couples hidden behind rocks, there were couples hidden behind bushes, there were couples hidden behind vines and creepers. Then there were couples out in the open, some were lying next to each other. Now, I like young people enjoying life, but this was a strange spectacle.

And then I spotted a group of two guys walking around, and like me they were looking clueless. A couple close by chuckled looking at this conspicuous pair. As I speculated what they must be thinking of me walking around all alone, I made a quiet retreat out of there.

The *baolis* of Delhi may not be as ornamented as their counterparts in Rajasthan or Gujarat, but each one has a story to tell. There is the Ugrasen Ki Baoli near Connaught Place which was supposedly built by Raja Ugrasen, the beautiful Rajon Ki Baoli in Lado Sarai Park, Gandhak Baoli near Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Dargah whose water smelled of sulphur, the famous Nizamuddin Baoli which spawned a saint's curse, and others.

A *baoli* is a step-well, which in turn is an underground structure, generally a flight of stairs going down to a reservoir of water. These *baolis* were a perennial source of water for the people living nearby in olden times, and also doubled up as a place for socializing. Ugrasen *baoli* is a simple, sturdy structure with arched recesses at the side walls. There is a long staircase running down all the four levels to the bottom. As I walked down the steps the Delhi skyline faded from view. The all-encompassing structure of the *baoli* created the sense of going back in time.

Situated in the middle of the metropolis among tall buildings this place was known to just a small number of people. On my first visit to this *baoli* two years earlier there were very few people around, just some college students bunking lectures and enjoying the solitude there. But on my second visit there was a rush of teenagers going towards it; on reaching there I saw groups of foreign tourists busy taking snapshots. It was only later that I came to know that the *baoli* had recently featured in a Hindi blockbuster, and this had overnight made the ancient step-well a cool hang-out place among the young.



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## Glossary of Indian Words

*amir* – emir, in the Indian context, an *amir* was a noble or grandee

*amir-shikar* – chief huntsman

*azaan* – a call for performing *namaaz*

*bangla* – bungalow

*baoli* – step-wells in ancient times

*Bapu* – father

*batta* – an allowance made to a public servant

*beg* – a lord or chieftain

*bhang* – a drink that is prepared by grinding hemp leaves, and can be added to milk or can be used to make *laddoos*. It is a socially acceptable way of consuming narcotics, especially during the popular festival of *holi*

*chaddar* – a sheet; in this context a decorated one, offered at the *dargah* of a saint

*char-bagh* – literally, four-gardens. This is a garden layout-form

*chauth* – literally meaning one-fourth, a tax levied by the Marathas on the produce of the land or on the revenue collected from it

*chaugan* – the game of polo

*chhajja* – a Hindustani awning

*chhatra* – adorned, pillared pavilions, generally found in Indian architecture. They are generally domed, but may also have flat roofs

*chilla* – in Sufism it is the forty-day period of seclusion where an ascetic remains in meditation and prayer

*dargah* – tomb of a saint

*darwaza* – gateway, usually an adorned one

*Delhi-wallah* – denizen of Delhi

*dhaba* – a roadside eatery

*dharamshala* – guest house, generally a resting place for travellers

*dhoti* – a lower-body traditional piece of clothing worn by Indian males. It covers the waist down to most of the legs.

*diwan* – in the Mughal context, it is a raised pavilion, generally used for conducting business of the state

*diwane* – the right to collect land revenue

*fakir(faqir)* – an ascetic who has shunned worldly possessions

*firangi* – foreigner, especially a white person

*firman* – edict, issued mostly by the emperor

*gali* - lane

*Garud* – a Hindu animal deity, with the head and wings of an eagle and body of man. It is the king of the birds and the mount of Lord Vishnu.

*gaz* – unit of measurement used in India, variable in different regions, but generally between two and three feet

*ghazi* – a Muslim warrior, who fought for his religion, either to propagate it or to protect other Muslims

*gumbad* - dome

*hammam* – a bath-house

*haram* – variant of harem

*haveli* – an early Indian mansion, generally built around a courtyard

*imam* – a prayer leader in a mosque

*iwan* - in Islamic architecture, a vaulted space used as an entrance, or, if closed at one end, a hall facing a court

*jaali* – intricate lattice-work. An integral part of ancient Indian architecture, *jaalis* were used as partitions or screens, or even in place of windows

*jagir* – land granted by the emperor to a subordinate as award for services rendered. The person holding the *jagir* would typically derive a portion of the land revenue from the *jagir*

*jaziya* – poll-tax levied on the non-Muslims

*jital* – smaller denomination coinage based on billon  
*jharokha* – in Indian architecture it is a heavily embellished balcony which extends out of the plane of the surrounding wall  
*kafir* - non-Muslim  
*kakam* – it is a junk, which is a large Chinese sailing vessel used for travelling large distances  
*kalima (Tayyaba)* – it is the affirmation of faith by a Muslim, “There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God”  
*kotwal* – an Indian police officer  
*khus* – a grass used for making perfumes, mats and also as coolant  
*khutba* – generally the address delivered in a mosque. In this context it means announcing the king's name in the address, thus proclaiming or confirming him king  
*kirtan* – devotional chanting of hymns by Sikhs  
*kos* – Indian unit of distance, usually 1 *kos* is around 2 miles  
*langar* – literally community kitchen. It is an integral part of Sikhism to organize a common dining hall where meal is served to all without distinction of caste or creed  
*lassi* – a drink made from curd or yoghurt, used as a coolant  
*madrassa* – an Islamic seminary imparting religious as well as general education  
*mahal* - palace  
*malik* – a leader of a community  
*mansabdar* – a person who held a *mansab*, or a rank. His pay was fixed according to his rank. This rank also meant that he was required to keep a certain number of horses and cavalry for military purposes.  
*masjid* - mosque  
*mazaar* - tomb  
*mohur* - a gold coin in early India  
*moth* – a lentil grown in India  
*mihrab* – an ornamental notch in the wall of a mosque which marks the direction of the *qibla*, towards which the faithful turn and pray  
*minar* – a tower, generally surrounding a mosque or tomb  
*mullah* – a religious teacher or leader  
*namaaz* – Islamic prayer  
*naqqarkhana* – (Mughal rule) it was the place where the ceremonial drum was beaten and other instruments played  
*naubat khana* – same as *naqqarkhana*  
*navratna* – literally nine gems. In this context it refers to the nine gems at Akbar's court.  
*nawab* – the title of a governor in Mughal times  
*palki* - palanquin  
*paratha* – traditional, thick, unleavened, fried Indian bread  
*parchinkari* – pietra dura  
*pir* - saint  
*pishtaq* – the decorated, generally rectangular, frame around the *iwan*  
*punkha* – early Indian fan, generally a large fan-like screen which was swayed from side-to-side by a servant  
*qawwali* – devotional Islamic singing, generally associated with Sufism  
*qazi* – a judge in an Islamic state, giving judgement according to Shariah Law  
*qibla* – the direction of the Kaaba, in Mecca. Muslims turn in this direction to perform prayer  
*rai* – the title of a ruler  
*raja* – an Indian king. In this context, it is the ruler of a small region or a ruler subordinate to the emperor  
*rubaiyat* – (plural of *rubai*) quatrains.  
*salwar-kameez* – traditional Indian dress, consisting of a long shirt and loose trousers  
*sarai* – caravanserai, a guest-house or inn  
*sati* – the Hindu practice of a widow burning at her husband's funeral pyre

*sayyid* – an Islamic title of respect, but also used for a Muslim descended from Prophet Muhammad through his grandson Husain

*shaikh* – in Islam, a man known and respected for his piety and learning

*silsila* – series or order, e.g. the Chishti Sufi order of saints

*sipahi* – variant of sepoy, an Indian soldier

*suji* – semolina, kind of granular Indian flour

*swaraj* - self-rule

*taluqdar* – during Mughal rule *taluqdars* collected land revenue for land under their control

*tanka* – generally, coinage made of silver

*tekhkhana* – in old Indian houses it is an underground cellar.

*tilak* – a mark worn on the forehead by Hindus

*ulema* – Muslim scholars trained in Islam

*urs* – death anniversary, especially of a saint

*wazir* – prime minister

*zenana* - seraglio